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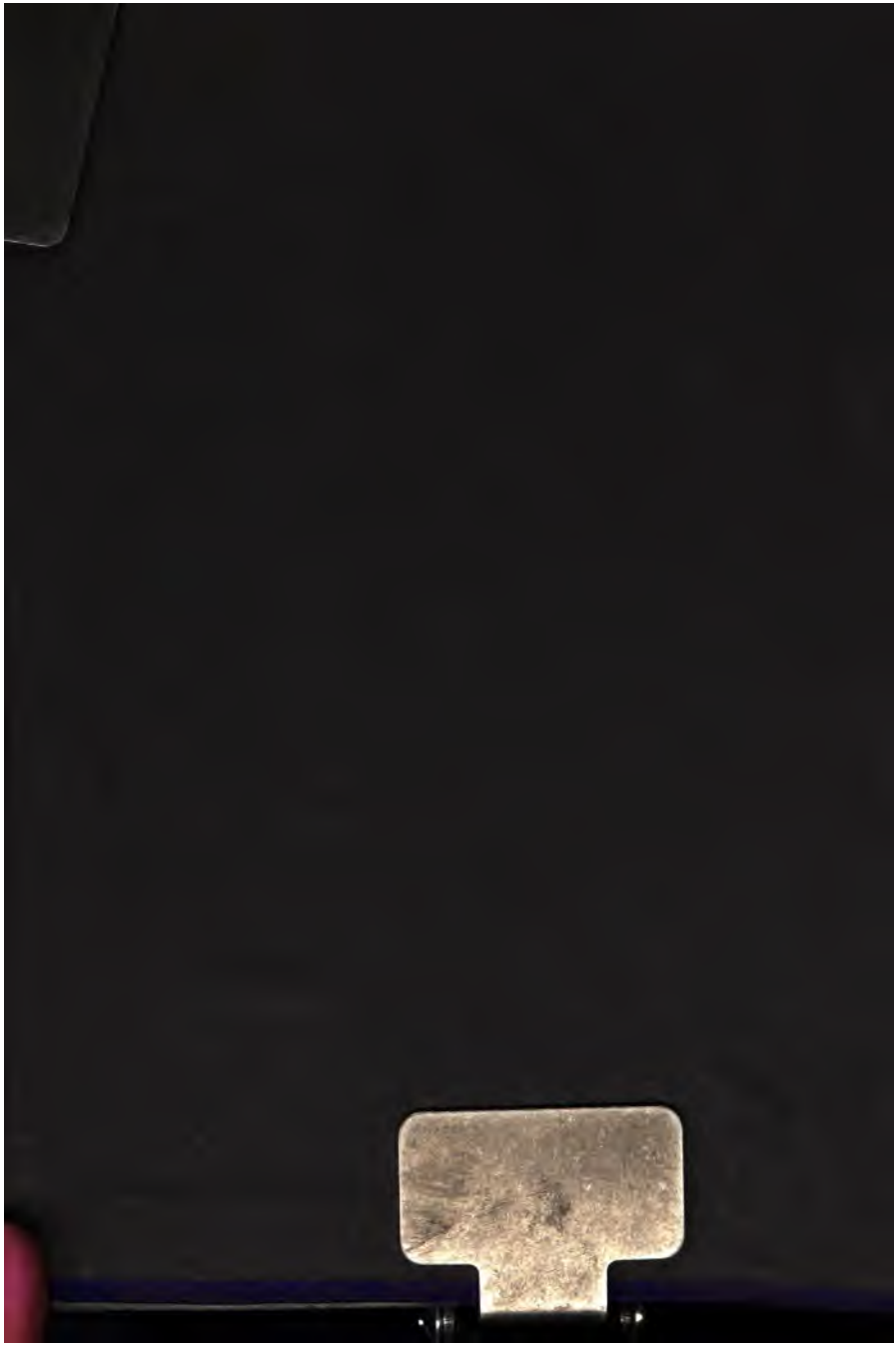

THE BELIEVER ON PISGAH.

MURRAY AND GIBB, EDINBURGH,
PRINTERS TO HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

T. Allom

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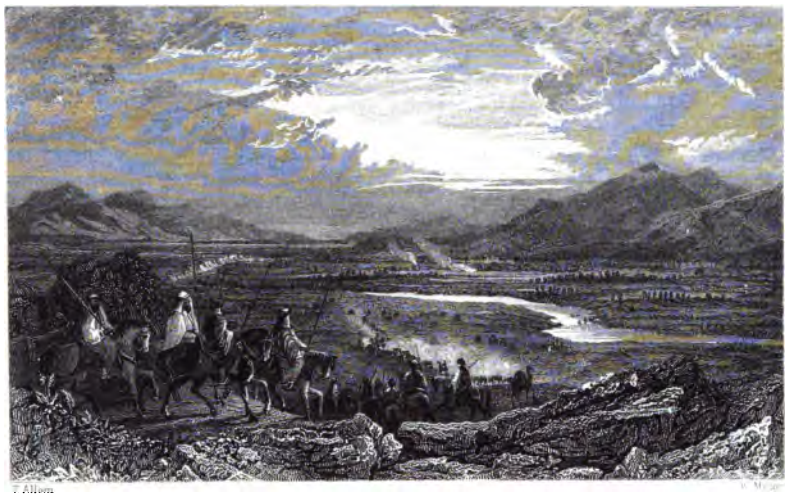

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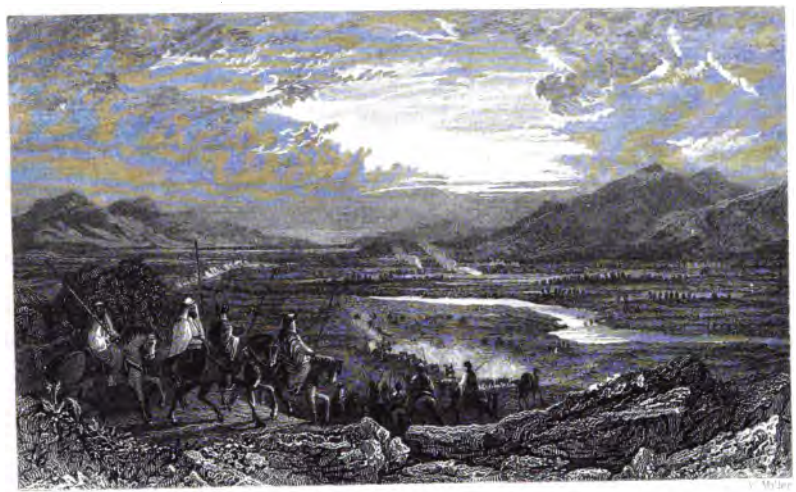

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THE BELIEVER ON PISGAH:

Sabbath Evening Meditations on Heaven.

BY

THE REV. THOMAS DOWNIE,

HAMPDEN, JAMAICA.

'To Pisgah's top I fly,
And there delighted stand,
To view beneath a shining sky
The spacious promised land.'—COWPER.

'And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah.
And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan.'
DEUT. XXXIV. 1.

EDINBURGH:
WILLIAM OLIPHANT AND COMPANY.
1874.

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TO

THE PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION OF ANTIGONISH,

IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA,

AND

THE PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION OF HAMPDEN, JAMAICA,

TO WHOM IT HAS BEEN THE AUTHOR'S PRIVILEGE AND HAPPINESS

TO MINISTER,

THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

WITH THE PRAYER THAT THEY, AND ALL WHO READ THESE MEDITATIONS,

MAY HAVE AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE INTO THE

HEAVENLY KINGDOM.

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THE BELIEVER ON PISGAH.

I.

PISGAH.

'And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan.'—DEUT. XXXIV. 1.

THE subject of the present meditation refers the mind back to a scene of thrilling interest in the life of Moses. His work on earth was done, and he was about to enter on the reward of his fidelity, in the immediate presence of that God who had often communed with him as he and the people of his charge pursued their march through the waste and howling wilderness. He had looked forward with eagerness to the day that should see the Israelites terminate their wanderings in the desert, and enter the land which had been promised to their nation. He had doubtless pictured to his mind the delight which he himself should experience when he crossed the Jordan, and trod the soil which had been rendered sacred as the residence of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Had he been permitted with Joshua to enter Canaan, we can imagine the feelings of thrilling interest with which he would have looked upon the scenes where many of the striking events which he himself had so graphically described transpired. If Cicero was affected when, in visiting Athens, he saw the places where Socrates, Plato,

and other illustrious philosophers had played their part in the drama of life, what emotions would have stirred the breast of Moses had he stood on the plains of Mamre, and thought of the time when Abraham pled there for the preservation of Sodom for the sake of his nephew Lot; or had he ascended Moriah, and rested on the spot where the patriarch bound his beloved son upon the altar of sacrifice, and gave such a display of faith as should make his name illustrious in every age of the world's history! What would have been his feelings had he entered the pass at Dothan, in the mountains of Gilboa, and pictured in imagination the scene that was enacted there,—a scene so pregnant with results to God's chosen people,—when Joseph's brethren, moved with envy, sold him as a slave to a company of travelling merchants!

Moses, however, was not permitted to enter that land to which the last forty years of his life had been spent in conducting the Israelites. When Jordan appeared in view, his earthly course was nearly run; only a few grains remained in the sand-glass of life. The time had come for him to die,—and that not amid sympathizing friends, but alone upon the mountain summit, and with no human eye resting upon him. He was, however, not to leave the world till he obtained a view of the goodly land which was soon to be in the possession of his brethren. He ascended the mountain range that rises to the height of more than three thousand feet on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, and there was privileged to survey the country, from Gilead unto Dan. How gorgeous must have been the panorama that stretched out before him! As he looked westward, he would see the hills and valleys of Judah; while the eye might distinguish Machpelah, where reposed the dust of sainted ancestors, or Moriah, where Isaac was laid upon the altar of sacrifice, and near the spot where, ages afterwards, He, whose day Abraham saw afar off and was glad,

was to die for the sins of a fallen world. Stretching his view northward, he would see the windings of the Jordan, with fertile plains on either side, and where numerous dwellings should be erected from which the voice of praise should daily ascend to the name of Jehovah. When Moses had thus viewed the land which was destined to be the glory of all lands, his work on earth was done; he closed his eyes in death, and, with no earthly friend near, the Almighty Himself consigned his body to the dust. Though he was not, however, permitted to enter the earthly Canaan, his soul was at once admitted to celestial bliss; and from that bliss he again appeared in the world, to console the Redeemer of mankind on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the prospect of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

Moses on Pisgah, surveying the beauties of the earthly Canaan, suggests another scene still more solemn and impressive, and that is, the believer in the prospect of death contemplating the glories of the celestial world. Canaan was in some striking respects a type of heaven. It was a goodly land—'a land flowing with milk and honey'—a land in which the Israelites 'should not lack anything.' So heaven is a garden of delights—a region in which every desire shall be gratified, and into which nothing shall ever enter to hurt or to destroy. Canaan was a land promised by God to His people. When God entered into a covenant with Abraham, He intimated that it should be occupied and possessed by his posterity. So is heaven promised to the believer in Christ; God has engaged to confer upon him all the bliss of the celestial world. Canaan was a gift bestowed upon the Israelites by God, and, beyond the divine promise, they could urge no claim to the possession of it. So heaven is not an inheritance purchased by the believer,—in himself he has no title to it,—and it is only secured to him on the ground of Christ's merit and

sacrifice. Jordan separated the desert through which the Israelites had passed from the land of promise. So death lies between earth and heaven, and through death the believer must pass before he enters on his purchased possession.

Just as Moses, before his death, obtained a view of the promised land, so does God often vouchsafe to the believer, as he draws near the hour of his departure from earth, a glimpse of the glory of the celestial Canaan. Then the spiritual vision is sometimes strengthened, and the Christian possessed of vital faith is enabled to look within the veil, and realize somewhat of the joys upon which he is about to enter. He seems to breathe the air of heaven before he is admitted within its gates, and his ear catches the distant sound of that melody which rises from the voices of the ten thousand times ten thousand angels who surround the throne of Jehovah. How distinct was the view that Stephen, during the few moments that preceded his martyrdom, obtained of the glory that encircles the Redeemer at the right hand of His Father! Standing in the Jewish Sanhedrim, and with his natural vision bounded by the roof of the edifice, neither distance nor material objects obstructed his sight as he looked into the eternal world, and saw the realities amid which he was soon to mingle. There was, indeed, something supernatural in the case of the proto-martyr; but who that has read the lives of God's saints, who, as they descended the dark valley, exhibited a strong and living faith in the power of Him who has the keys of hell and of death, can doubt that, in the experience of many of them, they obtained glimpses of coming bliss, which led them to look forward with rapture to the hour that should admit them to the general assembly and church of the first-born? With what triumph, for example, did Janeway, Payson, Harvey, and Toplady, men eminent for piety and devotedness to the divine will, contemplate,

as they drew near the confines of eternity, their approaching entrance into the New Jerusalem! To sustain and animate them amid their struggle with the last enemy, the veil, which hides celestial glories from the view of mortals, seemed for a time withdrawn.

Am I a pilgrim to the heavenly world, and are my affections set upon it? Then let me often contemplate its glories, as these are portrayed in the inspired volume, that thus I may be growing in fitness for the enjoyment of them. The more familiar that I am in time with the realities of eternity, the better shall I be prepared to face them when the hour of my departure comes. Let me seek to have the living faith that distinguished eminent saints, and which imparted to them in their dying hours glimpses of coming bliss. As Moses was permitted on Pisgah to survey the land of Canaan, the type of that better land into which he was about to enter, so let my earnest prayer be, that when death is drawing near, I may, in the exercise of unclouded hope, look beyond the boundary-line that separates time from eternity, and, contemplating those joys which are at the right hand of God, rest assured of an abundant entrance into them.

'As when the weary traveller gains
The height of some o'erlooking hill,
His heart revives if 'cross the plains
He sees his home, though distant still.

'Thus, when the Christian pilgrim views,
By faith, his mansion in the skies,
The sight his fainting strength renews,
And wings his speed to reach the prize.

'The thought of home his spirit cheers,
No more he grieves for trouble past;
Nor any future trial fears,
So he may safe arrive at last.'

II.

THE EARTHLY SABBATH A TYPE OF THE HEAVENLY.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day."—REV. I. 10.

AMONG the ordinances which the great Head of the Church has appointed to advance the spiritual welfare of His people, the Sabbath holds a distinguished place. Its weekly return is hailed by the toilworn labourer, as he can then shake off the anxious cares that have oppressed him on other days, and hold undisturbed communion with the Father of his spirit. To the head of a family, it affords a favourable opportunity of unfolding the doctrines and enforcing the duties of religion. To the saint far advanced in the divine life, it is a season of spiritual refreshing; it is accounted the best day of all the seven—the day on which he ascends Mount Pisgah, and, with the eye of faith, surveys the glories of the celestial landscape.

Attempts have sometimes been made to show that the Sabbath is a mere Jewish institution, which was abolished when the Christian dispensation was introduced. Were such a view to become widely prevalent, it is not difficult to foresee the result to which it would lead. Let the Sabbath be banished from the world, and soon religion would die out—vice of every description would flood lands now blessed with gospel light—society, where it is now civilised, would relapse into ignorance and barbarism—moral and spiritual darkness would before long cover the whole earth. Apart from the advantages of the Sabbath, and which attest its divine origin, its perpetual obligation

is clearly taught in the word of God. Instead of being a mere Jewish rite, it was instituted in Paradise, and was observed by our first parents before sin alienated their affections from God. We have clear evidence that it was recognised by the Israelites before the giving of the law from Sinai; and the design of the fourth commandment was simply to remind them of the duty of keeping an ordinance with which they were already familiar. Christ, who was Lord of the Sabbath, instead of abolishing it when He appeared to introduce the new dispensation, proclaimed its universal obligation by declaring that it was made for man—not for the Jew merely, but for man in general. The day on which the Sabbath was to be observed was indeed changed after the resurrection of Christ; but that did not alter the principle on which the law rests, and accordingly we find the disciples statedly assembling on the first day of the week for religious worship.

What renders the Sabbath in an especial manner precious to the believer is, that it is a type of the eternal Sabbath which he hopes to spend with the Redeemer in the mansions of bliss. Like John in Patmos, when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, he obtains visions of celestial glory, which stimulate him to increased diligence in preparing for the high destiny that awaits him.

The earthly Sabbath is a type of the heavenly as regards the rest which it provides for man. The Sabbath is a day of rest: 'In it thou shalt not do any work' (Ex. xx. 10). For the comfort and refreshment of man the Sabbath was appointed. To the sons of toil, oppressed by labour and hardship during the week, how welcome is the return of the Sabbath! When Saturday evening comes, what gladness fills their hearts as they can take up the language of Moses, and say, 'To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord!' To the merchant, whose mind has been oppressed with worldly care, what a load is lifted from his

spirits as the morning of the Sabbath dawns upon him, and he has the prospect of devoting one day to the attention of matters higher than those of time. Nor is it only during the hours of the Sabbath that its advantages as a season of rest are enjoyed: the prospect of its return, amid the toil and bustle of the week, is as water to the weary and thirsty traveller.

Viewing the earthly Sabbath as a day of rest, how appropriately is it an emblem of the heavenly Sabbath—the rest that remaineth for the people of God. In his eternal home, the believer enters into repose, which no storm will ever arise to disturb. The careworn labourer, when he reaches the Saturday evening of life and falls asleep in Christ, awakes in a world on whose horizon no cloud of care or sorrow shall ever be seen. There will be rest from every calamity that on earth harasses and grieves the people of God. Disease, which in this vale of tears often causes its victims months or years of suffering, will never invade the eternal home of the redeemed. Crosses and disappointments, which here below frequently wring the heart with anguish, will be unknown there. Bereavement, which so often enters the household on earth, and leaves desolation and woe behind, will never be experienced in our Father's house of many mansions. There will be rest from sin, with all the misery which it entails. The moment the believer enters upon the possession of his heavenly inheritance, his nature will be made perfectly holy, and never again will he have to contend with the storms of temptation from without, or the workings of unbelief from within. Satan will not enter the regions of bliss to disturb his peace; he shall for ever be beyond the reach of the ungodly influence with which on earth he had daily to contend; with his warfare ended, he shall wear the diadem of victory, and repose in safety in the arms of infinite love. Time's week of labour has ended, and the eternal Sabbath of rest and enjoyment has begun.

The earthly Sabbath is a type of the heavenly as regards the services in which on that day the people of God engage. The Church below is the emblem of the Church above, and the exercises of the one are identical with those of the other. The difference consists in the degree of purity and fervour that characterizes the worshippers in the earthly and heavenly temples. In the sanctuary below, sin and imperfection mar the beauty of the service; in the sanctuary above, no taint of sin will pollute the devotions that are offered in the presence of Jehovah. Here the saint, by reason of the infirmity of his nature, often feels a sense of weariness stealing over him in the performance of his worship; there his eye shall be ever bright, his understanding ever unclouded, his energies ever active, and his harp ever in tune. Among all the hosts of the redeemed, seraphic fervour will characterize their worship; and every note of praise that is sung will rise from a heart filled with gratitude and love to the source of all good.

But wide though the contrast is between the character of the worship of the Church Militant and that of the Church Triumphant, the exercises of the earthly Sabbath are essentially those that will occupy the redeemed in their devotions before the eternal throne. Praise constitutes a leading element in the services of the earthly Sabbath, and not less prominent will it be amid the services of the heavenly Sabbath. There the redeemed, as they stand in the immediate presence of Jehovah, and contemplate the glories of His character, will express their admiration in songs of seraphic ardour. As they cast their crowns at the feet of the Redeemer, seated on His exalted throne, feelings of intense love will inflame their minds, and loud will be the ascription of praise with which they shall celebrate His mediatorial honours. When they reflect, as oftentimes they will reflect, on the salvation which divine grace wrought for them, and whereby, rescued from guilt and its consequent ruin, they

were made heirs of the blessed immortality which they now enjoy, how deep will be the gratitude which animates their hearts, and how fervent will be the song which they raise!

Prayer is an important exercise amid the devotions of the earthly sanctuary, and we are not to suppose that it will be excluded from the worship of the heavenly sanctuary. It is frequently averred, that while praise will constitute a prominent element amid the services of the redeemed in glory, prayer will have no place there. But to assert that prayer will be unknown in heaven is to be wise above that which is written. Nowhere in the word of God is it stated that prayer is confined to the services of the Church below, and will form no part of the services of the Church in glory. May we not rather suppose that, as the ordinance draws the believer into closer fellowship with the Redeemer on earth, it will still in eternity be a medium for bringing the soul into a more intimate communion with Him? The happiness of heaven admits of degrees, and every fresh communication of divine love to the saint will constitute a new element in his bliss. May we not therefore suppose that, in answer to the prayers of glorified believers, a richer measure of bliss will be imparted, and a closer assimilation to the divine image be effected in their character? As they explore creation, and contemplate the works and perfections of Jehovah, will they not realize their need of a more enlarged vision, to comprehend many of the subjects that come within the range of their studies? And is it unreasonable to conclude that they will go in prayer to the great fountain of wisdom to obtain the increased illumination which they desire?

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance celebrated in the Church below, and by means of it the believer is brought into more intimate fellowship with the Redeemer. When seated at the table, and partaking of this New Testament feast, he realizes heaven as it were let down into his soul, and he is constrained to breathe the wish, 'Oh that I had

wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest' (Ps. lv. 6). In the fellowship with Christ which he there enjoys he has a foretaste of the exalted bliss which he shall have in His immediate presence, when he shall see Him as He is, and reflect His spotless image. In the celestial world, the visible symbols of the Saviour's dying love will not be needed, for He will there be beheld, not through the dim medium of faith, but face to face; and His presence will ever call up before their minds the remembrance of what He did for them when He hung on the accursed tree, and shed His precious blood for their redemption. But still the fellowship which they had with Him at the table in the Church below was an earnest of their more intimate communion with Him amid the services of the eternal Sabbath. Did their hearts burn within them as, partaking of the bread and wine, they thought of His love and condescension? Their souls will thrill with holy gratitude as they see on His glorified body the marks of the wounds that were inflicted on it when He suffered as their Substitute. Did they, as they sat at His table, and through the medium of the memorials that portrayed His dying love, see in the sacrifice that He offered on Calvary the price that was paid for their redemption? They shall, amid the services of the heavenly sanctuary, ever look back to the cross as the foundation of the exalted hopes which have now ripened into the fruition of bliss. Did they, as they observed the New Testament feast, enjoy intimate communion with the Redeemer and their Christian brethren? When they take their seats in the mansions of glory, and see Jesus as He is, their fellowship with Him will be immediate and endearing; while the society of the wise and good, from every age and clime, will open up a source of refined and ever-varying delight. What the bud is to the flower, what the first-fruit is to the glorious harvest, the services of the earthly sanctuary are to those of the heavenly.

Let me, then, prize the earthly Sabbath as a type of the celestial. Let me view it as a cord, woven by the hand of infinite love, to draw my affections off the transitory things of time, and place them on the unseen glories of the heavenly state. As its light dawns upon me, let my aspirations be directed upwards. Let me seek, in the strength of divine grace, to shake off the thoughts and cares that have been clogging my spirit during the week. Let me rise above the world, and, like Moses on Pisgah, catch a ravishing view of those glories which are enjoyed in that land where an eternal Sabbath is kept. Let my Sabbaths be, as it were, stepping-stones to holy meditation, from which I shall descend, amid the scenes and business of the world, holier and more devout, with more of Christ exhibited in my character, and more of heaven reflected in my life. Thus will my earthly Sabbaths be a preparation for the eternal Sabbath of heaven, and, at the same time, a foretaste of the joys yet to be revealed.

'Thine earthly Sabbath, Lord, we love,
But there's a nobler rest above;
To that our lab'ring souls aspire,
With ardent hope and strong desire.

'In Thy bless'd kingdom we shall be
From every care and trouble free;
No sighs shall mingle with the songs
Resounding from immortal tongues.

'No rude alarms of raging foes,
No cares to break the long repose;
No clouded sun, no changeful moon,
But sacred, high, eternal noon.'—DODDRIDGE.

III.

THE BELIEVER DESIRING HIS DEPARTURE.

'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.'—PHIL. I. 23.

DEATH is a subject which mankind in general contemplate with feelings of awe and dread. *Through fear of it*, says the apostle, *men are all their lifetime subject to bondage.* Familiar as we are with it, frequently as we are called upon to see our fellow-men numbered among its victims, still the very thought of it seldom fails to shroud our minds in gloom. How eagerly does the youth cling to life, and how unwilling he is to resign the enjoyments of earth, when disease is making its ravages, and indicating the approach of the last enemy! The man involved in the cares of earth, with his temper ruffled by the crosses and anxieties of business, might, one would imagine, be ready at any moment to welcome death. But no; he rather seeks to exclude it from his thoughts. The old man, leaning on his staff and suffering from the infirmities of declining years, might, we should suppose, be longing for the approach of death, to take him from a world in which he is a burden to himself and all around him. But with all the ardour of youth he holds on to life, and is unwilling to depart.

Now, in many respects, we need not wonder at the feeling of dread which fills the minds of men at the contemplation of death. In itself it is a curse, and not a blessing. It is one of the sad consequences that flow from the introduction of sin into our world. Looking at the effects which it produces on the body, how dismal are its ravages! That body,

assured him that on the very day on which his earthly life was terminated, his spirit should be with Himself in Paradise. The doctrine of the apostles on this, as on all other points, was but the echo of their Master's teaching. They ever declared, without any marks of doubt or hesitation, that death, to the believer, is succeeded by immediate glory. In accordance with this belief, Paul expressed the firm conviction that departure from earth would, in his experience, be at once followed by presence with the Redeemer.

Another truth taught by the expressed desire of the apostle is, that after death the believer is admitted to the immediate presence of Christ. Paul had *a desire to depart and to be with Christ.* He knew that in the celestial world he should meet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the founders of the nation to which he once esteemed it such a distinguished honour to belong. He knew that he should there converse with Moses, whose law he had employed as a schoolmaster to bring his countrymen to Christ. He knew that he should there see David, whose psalms he had often sung, and join with him in celebrating Jehovah's praise. He knew that he should there associate with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets, who in their writings had described so graphically the coming and glory of the Messiah. He knew that he should hold fellowship with multitudes of redeemed men and women whom he had been instrumental in bringing to a saving knowledge of the truth, and whom he should recognise as his joy and crown. He knew that he should there be introduced to the society of the innumerable company of angels, who had rejoiced with him in the fruits of his efforts to advance the cause of Christ, and who, through the ages of a glorious eternity, should be his fellow-students, helping him to trace new wonders in the gospel plan of mercy. But though the apostle foresaw that in the celestial world he should be admitted to fellowship with

saints and angels, and participate in their bliss, the prospect of his departure made Christ the absorbing theme of his contemplation. He desired to bid farewell to earth, that he might see the Redeemer whom he loved, and enjoy uninterrupted communion with Him.

To the genuine believer, the hope of heaven at once suggests the fellowship with Christ that is to be enjoyed there. The Redeemer is indeed present with His people amid the changes and afflictions of their earthly lot. He has promised to be in the midst of them when they assemble for His worship. He assures them of His sympathy and protection when troubles and dangers befall them. But though they see Him now, it is only dimly, with the eye of faith. In the celestial world, however, they shall see Him as He is; the perfections of His character shall be beheld by them without an intervening cloud; and no barrier of unbelief shall rise to hinder their most intimate communion with Him. The view which Scripture gives of heaven, as the place where the presence of Christ is felt and enjoyed, is the most consolatory that could be presented. Surrounded as we are by the darkness and infirmity of earth, the ideas which we form of the future world are dim and indistinct. Its locality and scenery, the physical construction and appearance of its inhabitants, and the nature of its enjoyments, are themes regarding which we can only say that *we now see through a glass darkly.* But, amid the imperfection of our present knowledge of the celestial world, there is one fact which Scripture clearly reveals respecting it, and that is, that Christ's presence is manifested and fellowship with Him enjoyed there. He is there beheld in all the glories of His divine character, and employing His unlimited resources to secure and perpetuate the bliss of those who found redemption through His blood.

As I meditate on the desire of the apostle to depart and

be with Christ, let my earnest prayer be that I may imitate his faith, and possess his unclouded assurance. Let me seek that state of readiness for death which enabled an eminent minister of Christ to say, that when he lay down in bed at night, it was to him a matter of no consequence whether he awoke in this world or another. If I truly love the Redeemer, should I not be longing for the time when faith shall give place to sight, and I shall be admitted to immediate fellowship with Him? As a means of raising my affections above the things of earth, and constraining me to place them on the unseen glories of the better world, let me often contemplate the exalted position which Christ now occupies, and the tender interest which He cherishes in the welfare of those who believe in Him. What an exuberance of bliss must pervade all the ranks of the redeemed as they surround the presence of Him who is the great fountain of happiness! Animated by the hope of coming bliss, let me view death not as a foe, but a friend, to admit me from a world of sin to a world of unclouded purity, there to bask in the everlasting sunshine of the Redeemer's love. When an individual leaves his native land with the view of settling in some distant country, anxious thoughts fill his mind as he reflects on the new and untried scenes upon which he is soon to enter. But if he knows that a dear friend, who is deeply interested in his welfare, is looking out for him, has a house prepared for his reception, and will be ready on the hour of his arrival to guide and befriend him, his fears are allayed, and he hails each returning day as bringing him nearer his desired haven. I am fast journeying to the eternal world—soon its realities will burst upon my gaze; but let me draw comfort from the thought that One, whose love to me was so great that He died to save me, will, at the hour of my departure, if I have an interest in His mediation, take me by the hand, and welcome me to the mansions of everlasting bliss.

'Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
My Saviour, my Eternal Rest!
Then only will this longing heart
Be fully and for ever blest!

'Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Thy unveiled glory to behold;
Then only will this wandering heart
Cease to be treacherous, faithless, cold!

'Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Where spotless saints Thy name adore;
Then only will this sinful heart
Be evil and defiled no more!

'Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Where none can die, where none remove;
There neither death nor life can part
Me from Thy presence and Thy love.'

IV.

ETERNAL LIFE—THE GIFT OF THE FATHER.

'The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'—ROM. VI. 23.

IN the verse a part of which forms the theme of this evening's meditation, two subjects are placed before us in vivid and striking contrast. The one is death; the other is life. While sin, on the one hand, leads to death, the grace of God, on the other, raises the soul to the possession of eternal life. The death here spoken of is not only the death of the body, though that is one of the consequences of sin. There is reason to believe that if sin had never entered our world, the body would not have been subject to corruption, but, like the soul, would have been immortal. It would probably, in its transition from earth to heaven, have undergone a change, similar to that which takes place in the caterpillar when it passes through the chrysalis and is transformed into the beautiful butterfly. But we apprehend that the apostle has a higher reference when he says that *the wages of sin is death.* The death of the soul is one of the sad consequences that flow from sin. By reason of sin, the soul is dead spiritually. It is dead to all that is morally good. The unconverted feel no concern about their immortal well-being. We may describe to them their state by nature; we may speak to them of the miseries of that hell on whose brink they are tottering; we may point out to them the excellence of the Redeemer's character, and His willingness to receive all who come to Him; we may discourse to them of heaven's happiness and glories;

but if the Divine Spirit accompany not our efforts, all our representations will be in vain; and why? because they are spiritually dead.

The word *death*, as here used by the apostle, applies also to the state to which the finally impenitent shall be consigned—eternal death, everlasting banishment from the divine presence. Sin not only leads to ruin in time, but to endless ruin hereafter. And this is the most dreadful of all kinds of death. What is the death of the body, or the death of the soul to all that is spiritually good, as compared with the eternal misery of both soul and body in hell? Unconverted men, with their minds blinded by the things of time and sense, may refuse to think of the destiny that awaits them if they die in a state of impenitence. But let a few months or years pass over their heads, and then, when temporal death overtakes them, they shall know what is implied in eternal death. It is, in the scriptural account of it, the separation of the soul from God, and the endurance of His wrath for ever and ever.

Such is *death*, the wages of sin, which the apostle contrasts with *eternal life*, which is the gift of God by His Son.

The blessing of *eternal life* is appropriately spoken of by the apostle as a *gift*. It is a blessing to which man by nature has no title. By his sin against the authority of heaven, he has forfeited all right to it. Had guilt never entered our world, such terms as those of *spiritual* and *eternal death* would never have been known. But the penalty of sin is death. But for the interposition of divine mercy, the condition of mankind would thus have been one of darkness and despair. No ray of hope would have settled on the sinner's path as he pursued his course to the eternal world. The glad tidings of mercy would never have burst upon his ear. Death would only have been encircled with gloom; and the only prospect would have been that of

the blackness of darkness for ever. The sun in the heavens might have continued to shine in all his splendour, but, in so far as this world was concerned, he would have shed his light only on a scene of moral desolation. All mankind, without exception, would have been in the condition of rebels, awaiting the sentence that was to consign them to the regions of everlasting despair.

But though man, by his guilt, forfeited all right to eternal life, he may again obtain a title to it. Sinful though he is, he can entertain the hope that the hour of death will be to him the hour of his deliverance from sin and Satan's power, —the hour of his entrance upon bliss, which shall be lasting as the bliss of Jehovah Himself.

In contemplating this gift of eternal life, it may serve to give us some idea of its nature if we consider some of the elements of which it is composed. What blessings does it include? One prominent feature in this gift is its entire freedom from the sorrows and sufferings which are endured on earth. This world is to many a scene of trouble, and is not inaptly termed a *vale of tears*. There is no doubt much happiness to be enjoyed in it. In the delights of social converse, in the tender ties of friendship, in the pleasures conveyed to the mind by the external senses, rich sources of happiness are opened up; and these are to be regarded as the faint echo of the bliss enjoyed by our first parents, before sin with its blighting influence stained their consciences. But still, whatever happiness may be enjoyed by man on this side the grave, it is at any moment liable to be taken from him. Some bitter ingredient may drop into his cup of pleasure which may lead him to turn from it with loathing and disgust. The friend whom he trusts may become his secret or avowed enemy. The health that he enjoys may be invaded by some deadly disease, which may cause him months or years of suffering. Losses in business, sorrow for the death of friends, fond expectations blasted—

these and other calamities make up the lot of man in this sinful world.

But the gift of eternal life includes deliverance from all the evils that have been described. The moment the believer closes his eyes in death, he is for ever freed from bodily pain and mental sorrow. No sooner does he enter on the possession of eternal life than his happiness is complete, and in no danger of being disturbed. Along with the absence of evil, there will also be the enjoyment of positive bliss. The faculties of the mind, no longer clogged with the infirmities of the body, will, with increasing vigour, trace new glories in the character of Jehovah. Then the veil will be drawn aside from many mysteries that now hang over the divine procedure. Here the soul is often disturbed with doubt and uncertainty; but, amid the enjoyments of eternal life, every mist and cloud shall disappear. Here we see through a glass darkly—every subject of contemplation has a shade thrown over it by the moral darkness of the understanding; but, in the celestial world, all truth will be perceived with clear and perfected vision. In immediate fellowship with the glorified Redeemer, what rich sources of happiness will be opened up to the soul of the ransomed sinner! *To be with Christ* is a phrase which implies the highest bliss of which the soul can conceive.

While the happiness which the believer hopes to possess is pure and perfect in its nature, what gives it its highest value is, that it will be everlasting in its duration. Life in heaven will be *eternal.* Unlike our present joys, which are often but the raptures of an hour amid the scenes of trouble and sorrow, this is bliss which, through the coming ages of eternity, will never be interrupted. 'The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements shall melt with fervent heat,'—the earth with all its wealth and magnificence shall be burnt up, but the felicity of the believer shall then be but commencing. And when millenniums shall have come and

gone, he shall still be augmenting in bliss, and his fellowship with the Redeemer shall be becoming closer and more intimate. When, with the strong eye of faith, we look beyond the boundaries of time, what enrapturing scenes meet our gaze! Imagination is lost as it attempts to measure the fulness of joy treasured at the right hand of God for the glorified saint.

This is *eternal life;* and when we consider what we are,—rebels against the authority of Heaven, with our natures polluted and degraded by sin,—we are apt to imagine that this is a gift too valuable, too angelic for us to possess. Eternal life is a blessing to which it may seem incredible that sinful mortals should be raised. But great and glorious though this gift is, it is conferred by God on sinners of the human family who exercise faith in the mediatorial work of His Son.

Eternal life, which is the gift of God, is imparted to the believer through the medium of Christ the Son. Now in what way does this blessing come to us through Christ? Eternal life is the gift of the Father through the Son, inasmuch as the Son has revealed the doctrine. Apart from the teaching of the Bible, mankind in ancient times had no definite knowledge of a future state. A vague belief in its existence was indeed found in the creeds of all nations. The heathen philosopher rejoiced in the hope of re-union, after death, with the friends whom he had loved on earth. The warrior expected that, in the future world, he would still engage in scenes of warfare, and, with men of kindred spirit with himself, converse on the battles he had fought and the victories he had won. The ignorant savage imagined that, on his entrance into a future state, he would experience delights akin to those he had found in the gratification of his depraved passions. But while belief in a condition of existence after death prevailed among heathen nations before the coming of Christ, the views which they

held on this subject were at best but dreamy uncertainties. Even Socrates, the wisest and best of Pagan philosophers, declared before his death, that whether the future state was desirable or not was unknown to mortals. Among Old Testament saints there was a firm belief in the reality of a state of bliss beyond the grave. The hope of future happiness comforted their souls amid the sorrows of their earthly lot. Job looked forward with confident expectation to the latter day, when he should see his Redeemer on the earth. David speaks of his flesh resting in hope; and Daniel predicts that *many who sleep in the dust shall awake.* But, strong though the faith of these and other Old Testament worthies was in this doctrine, they but beheld it in the grey dawn of the morning as compared with the resplendent light that was shed upon it by the teaching of Christ. As the Sun of Righteousness, He arose and scattered the clouds of uncertainty that hung over man's prospects for eternity. He had come from the world of bliss, where the brightest manifestation of the Father's glory in the wide universe is exhibited. Before His omniscient eye, as He trod our earth, all its felicity was unveiled; and therefore neither doubt nor hesitation characterized His utterances respecting it. It was not with Him as it was with Isaiah and John, who saw heaven only in symbol. He had dwelt amid its realities; to His name its praises had been sung; the happiness of its inhabitants was but the faint reflection of His own unsullied bliss; and accordingly, all His declarations respecting it bore the stamp of eternal truth. To Him it was reserved to bring life and immortality to light by the gospel.

Again, the gift of eternal life comes to the believer through Christ, inasmuch as He has purchased it. Man by nature has no title to eternal life. Once he possessed the title, but he lost it. When Adam was created in Paradise, he was perfectly holy, and, on account of his perfect holiness, was

perfectly happy; but, by his sin against the authority of Heaven, he not only lost the felicity which resulted from innocence, but became exposed to eternal misery. This is the position in which all mankind are placed by sin. They are immortal; but if they die out of Christ, the immortality that lies before them is an immortality of woe.

But on the heart of the sinner involved in guilt and ruin, rays of hope have been reflected from the mediatorial work of Christ. He came to our earth not only to purchase pardon, but a title to eternal life. The gates of heaven, which were closed against the sinner, He has unlocked; and thus the way has been opened for his admission to happiness, perfect in its nature and unending in its duration. This gift Christ purchased by submitting to a sacrifice of infinite value. It was by the shedding of His precious blood that He secured eternal redemption for His people. He resigned for a season the glories of heaven, assumed the nature of man, passed through a life of sorrow, and submitted to an agonizing death, that our souls might be raised from the ruin of sin and put in possession of everlasting bliss. Our salvation demanded a price of infinite value, and only the eternal Son of God could pay down such a price. The gift has been purchased, and all the sinner has to do in order to obtain it is to exercise faith in the mediatorial work of God's beloved Son. Resting upon the sacrifice of Christ, his guilt is cancelled; he stands before heaven pardoned and accepted; and when the messenger of death summons him from earth, he shall enter upon bliss perfect and unclouded.

As I contemplate the gift of eternal life, so glorious in its character, purchased at such infinite cost, and so freely bestowed, let sentiments of love and gratitude to the Author of redemption fill my heart. But for the mercy of God, and the sufferings of His beloved Son, what would now have been my condition? I should have been in the posi-

tion of fallen angels, for whom no remedial plan has been provided, and who are reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the Great Day. But thanks, eternal thanks be to the Almighty, that when mankind were ruined by sin and exposed to His wrath, He sent His Son to this fallen world, that, by enduring a life of sorrow and a death of suffering, sinners like myself might be rescued from ruin, and put in possession of eternal bliss. If angels sing with rapture of the perfections of Christ's character, surely it becomes those for whom such a sacrifice has been undertaken to call upon their souls, and all that is within them, to praise and magnify the riches of His redeeming love. To awaken sentiments of gratitude, and keep them in lively exercise, let me frequently contemplate the magnitude of the gift which God, if I have an interest in the redeeming work of Christ, will confer upon me at the hour of death. Eternal life, unending happiness, will be my portion. As praise to Christ will occupy my tongue in the realms of bliss, let me even now unite with glorified saints around the throne, and sing the song, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!'

'I go to life and not to death,
From darkness to life's native sky;
I go from sickness and from pain
To health and immortality.

'For toil there comes the crownèd rest;
Instead of burdens, eagle's wings;
And I, even I, this life-long thirst
Shall quench at everlasting springs.

'God lives! Who says that I must die?
I cannot, while Jehovah liveth!
Christ lives! I cannot die, but live;
He life to me for ever giveth.'—BONAR.

V.

THE FOUNDATION OF HOPE.

'For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables.'—2 PET. I. 16.

SUCH was the testimony of Peter to the truth of the religion which he had for many years zealously propagated. He was now an old man. The strain of this epistle is such as to show that, at the time he wrote it, he was a ripe Christian, and well advanced in years. As he drew near the close of his life, while his body may have been giving indications of decay, his faith in Christ and the truth of His cause seems to have been gathering strength. During his Lord's stay upon earth, he had abundant opportunities of judging whether He was what He professed to be—a teacher come from God. He had seen Him walk on the waves of the Sea of Galilee. He had witnessed His divine power, as displayed in calming the storm, healing the sick, and raising the dead. He had heard such words of wisdom issuing from His lips as proclaimed Him to be no ordinary man, but God and man united in one person. He had traced His holy and spotless life—a life so different from that of other men, that he was persuaded it was an embodiment, in human form, of heaven's purity. He had, indeed, seen his Master despised and put to death as a malefactor; but, at the same time, he had beheld the crowning proof of His Messiahship in His resurrection from the tomb and ascension from earth to heaven. Peter had seen evidence that the religion of Christ was divine, by the effects which it had produced

in the world. He had seen the man of fierce and savage nature transformed by it into the quiet and gentleness of the lamb. He had himself experienced its consoling and sustaining power in the midst of trials, afflictions, and persecutions. Now that the infirmities of old age were coming upon him, he felt that the truths which he had often proclaimed to his fellow-men were the solace and comfort of his own soul. On contemplating, therefore, the religion of Christ in its origin, progress, and results, he could say from the bottom of his heart, *That religion is divine. In following it we have not followed cunningly-devised fables. We know that the doctrines which we have taught are of heavenly origin, for we received them from the lips of Him whose miracles and holy life proclaimed Him to be a teacher come from God.*

Peter had a firm conviction that the Christian religion was true, because he had conversed with Christ, had witnessed His displays of power, and had seen Him ascend from earth to heaven. But we are not to suppose that the apostles were the only parties who possessed clear and satisfactory evidence that Christianity is true. We, who live many centuries after the events that are recorded in the gospel, have as abundant proof that the religion of Christ is divine in its origin as if with our own eyes we had witnessed His displays of power.

In cherishing the hope of celestial glory, it becomes us carefully to examine the ground on which that hope rests. Were Christianity a cunningly-devised fable, our prospects of future felicity would, at the hour of death, be extinguished in eternal night. But, blessed be God, the truth of our holy religion is sustained by a mass of evidence which ought to dispel the very shadow of doubt, and convince every candid mind that it is heavenly in its origin. The believer who has sought salvation through Christ can look forward with calm confidence to the possession of

everlasting bliss, because it is promised in that book which he knows was inspired by the Spirit of God.

Many volumes have been written in support of the truth of Christianity, and, within the brief space of a single meditation, we can only glance at one or two branches of the evidence on which that truth rests. One strong and incontrovertible argument in favour of the divine origin of the Christian religion is, that the Bible contains numerous prophecies which were fulfilled ages after they were written. Prophecies are the prediction of future events, which could be known only to the mind of the Omniscient God; as such prophecies are found in the Scriptures, and we learn from history that they have been accomplished, it follows that these Scriptures are divinely inspired, and must therefore be true. So overpowering is the evidence arising from prophecy, that, in many cases, infidels who have examined it have been constrained to lay aside their opposition to the truth, and admit that the Bible is, what it professes to be, a revelation from heaven to earth. It was, for example, by the study of prophecy that the Earl of Rochester was led to abandon his scepticism, and become a believer in the truth of Scripture.

The prophecies of the Bible are so numerous, that we can only refer to the more prominent of them. How striking is the testimony to the truth of Scripture furnished by the predictions respecting the coming of Christ to our world! We know from profane as well as sacred history, that at the beginning of what is termed the Christian era, such a person as Jesus of Nazareth lived on our earth; that He founded a religion which was called after Him; that He was despised by His countrymen; and that He was put to death on a cross. An account of His crucifixion was written by Pontius Pilate, transmitted to Rome, preserved for ages in the archives of the imperial city, and appealed to by Christian writers in defending their religion. Suetonius,

Tacitus, and Pliny, Pagan authors, record His death as a matter of history; while Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, inveterate enemies to Christianity, never attempted to deny His existence. If, therefore, an infidel of the present day should declare that such a person as Christ never lived in our world at the time the Bible says He did, he might with equal reason consign all history to the region of fable or romance. We know further, that hundreds of years before Jesus appeared on our earth, the books of the Old Testament, as we now have them, were in existence. Three centuries before the Christian era they were translated into Greek, for the use of the Jews then residing in Egypt. Now, if in these Old Testament Scriptures, which, as we have seen, were in existence hundreds of years before Christ was born, the leading events of His life are described, what fact can more clearly show that these writings were penned by the Spirit of divine wisdom? That such prophecies regarding the Saviour do exist in the Old Testament, is a truth which will at once be admitted by all who are acquainted with its contents. We find the place of His birth, the manner of His life, the treatment which He should receive from His countrymen, His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the price to be paid for His betrayal, the character of His sufferings, the circumstances attending His death, His resurrection from the tomb, and His ascension to the glory of heaven, all specified. Let the infidel explain the fact as he may, there these predictions stand, and testify to the truth of God's written word.

Then there are prophecies in the Bible regarding the Jews—their character and dispersion, and the treatment which they should receive from Gentile nations; prophecies regarding the fall of Jerusalem and its temple; prophecies affecting the ruin and desolation that should overtake certain dynasties and countries,—all which prophecies have been fulfilled to the very letter. Does not the accomplish-

ment of these predictions proclaim that the Bible, which contains the offer of eternal life through Christ's atoning sacrifice, is a book divinely inspired?

The truth of the Christian religion is also clearly established by the miracles that were wrought in confirmation of it. A miracle is a deed which only the power of God can accomplish; and if it can be shown that Christ and His apostles performed miracles, the fact proclaims that they were the accredited messengers of Heaven. That Christ did many wonderful works—that by a word He cured the sick, raised the dead, calmed the rage of the storm, and walked on the waves of the Sea of Galilee, are events which the evangelists, who were eye-witnesses of His life, record. The Gospels, which contain the narrative of His miraculous deeds, were circulated and read in the land of Palestine, so that, had they contained any inaccuracy, it would at once have been detected, and thus the writers would have been overwhelmed with confusion and disgrace. For centuries after the apostolic age there was a succession of Christian authors, who had the most satisfactory means of knowing whether the facts recorded in the Gospels actually took place; and their unwavering belief was, that these Gospels were a faithful record of the life of Christ. Even the enemies of Christianity never called in question the truth of the New Testament narrative; the miracles of Christ they admitted, though they sought to account for them by the supposition that they were wrought by the influence of magic. The miracles of Christ are thus facts which can be as clearly established as any event in history; and as He was possessed of miraculous power, He must have come from God, and all His teachings respecting the future state and destiny of man are to be received as the oracles of eternal truth.

The truth of the Christian religion may also be established from the sublimity of the doctrines which it unfolds,

and the purity of the precepts which it inculcates,—doctrines and precepts which as far transcend the teachings of heathen philosophy, as the sun, when he shines in mid-day splendour, exceeds the feeble light emitted by a taper. But there is one argument in support of the truth of Christianity which, by the genuine believer, will be regarded as more satisfactory than all others, and that is its adaptation to the wants and constitution of man. He feels that the religion of the Bible supplies a void which the world cannot fill. He knows that the more closely he conforms his life to its requirements, the greater is the measure of happiness that he experiences. He realizes in it a power to console and sustain him amid the difficulties and afflictions of earth. He rests assured that a religion which meets all the necessities of his moral nature must have come from heaven. He therefore confides in its promises, and is persuaded that the hopes of future bliss which it inspires will be accomplished.

Let the clearness of the evidence on which the truth of the Christian religion rests strengthen my hope of future glory. Were that evidence unsatisfactory, I should have no solid foundation on which to base my expectation of everlasting life. But, blessed be God! the proofs on which the divine authority of the Christian religion rests are so ample, that no distressing doubt ought to dim my prospect of coming bliss. Let me, then, ever regard the things of eternity as grand realities, which I shall before long contemplate. Let me awake from the indifference about celestial happiness which is so apt to steal over me. Just as the Bible is true,—and that it is so is a proposition which can be established by a mass of incontrovertible evidence,—so shall the rewards of heaven, if I am united to Christ by faith, be conferred upon me at the termination of my earthly course. Can I, then, be unconcerned about my future destiny? Let my earnest prayer be that my affec-

tions, gradually severed from earth and time, may be placed on *those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*

'Saviour, perfect my trust,
Strengthen the might of my faith;
Let me feel as I would when I stand
On the rock of the shore of death.'—CAREY.

VI.

THE REDEEMER'S HEAVENLY HONOURS.

'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.'—PHIL. II. 9, 10.

HOW striking is the contrast between the position that Christ now occupies in the celestial world and the humiliation through which He passed when, as the Redeemer of fallen man, He tabernacled on our earth! The Apostle John had enjoyed intimate converse with Him during the years of His public ministry; he had received many tokens of His tender regard; he had lain on His breast at supper; but when, in vision, he beheld His Master surrounded with divine glory in heaven, he fell at His feet as dead. What emotions must have filled the minds of Peter and the other disciples, when, after the termination of their earthly warfare, they were welcomed to the immediate presence of Him in whose cause they had laboured, and to whose sacrifice they were indebted for the eternal bliss upon which they had entered! Excepting the few interviews which they held with Him after His resurrection, and their earnest gaze after Him, as, from the summit of the Mount of Olives, He ascended from earth to heaven, their last look on Him was when He hung on the accursed tree, exposed to the malice and contempt of His enemies. But how changed was the scene which now burst on their glorified vision! The crucified Nazarene was now the Lord of glory; instead of a crown of thorns, a diadem of divine

honour rested upon His head; instead of Roman soldiers bowing the knee before Him in mockery, angels and glorified saints were, in lowly adoration, celebrating His praise.

The contrast betwixt the humiliation and exaltation of Christ is brought strikingly out by the apostle in the chapter which contains the theme of our present meditation. He describes the position of glory which He occupied in the heavenly world, before He appeared on our earth to carry out the work of human redemption; and then points out the various grades of His condescension, which found its lowest depths in the agonies that were endured on the cross of Calvary. But from the scene of sorrow and suffering which had been so graphically depicted, the apostle at once lifts our contemplation to the honour and glory that now surround the person of the Redeemer at the right hand of His Father.

Looking at the exaltation of Christ, the inquiry at once suggests itself, In what does this exaltation consist? The explanation given of it by the apostle is twofold: First, *that God had highly exalted Him;* and secondly, *that He had given Him a name which is above every name.* It was not as a divine being that He was exalted, for in that respect He never was debased. Christ is God, and it would be contrary to all our ideas of the Godhead to suppose that any of its attributes should be degraded. He laid aside, indeed, the glory of God when He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but the essence of God remained unchanged. The divine nature was the same when He appeared as a man on our earth as when, in the exercise of omnipotence, He stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and peopled the immensity of space with worlds; but its dazzling lustre was veiled beneath a robe of humanity. When, therefore, He ascended to heaven after His resurrection, His divine character would appear just as it had been presented to angels and the hosts of the

redeemed before the incarnation and sufferings to which He submitted that He might carry out the plan of man's redemption.

If, then, not the divine character, the human nature of Christ was exalted after His ascension to the world of glory. His humanity was then raised above the degradation and suffering to which it was subjected during the period that He stood in the room of sinful men. It is not now exposed to the rage and malice of His enemies; it is not now liable to hunger, thirst, and weariness; His countenance does not now bear an expression of sorrow; His eyes are not now suffused with tears, such as He shed at the grave of Lazarus, or while contemplating the approaching doom of Jerusalem; never again will He be suspended on a cross; never again will His bodily powers lie lifeless in a tomb.

That the Redeemer's body, at His ascension, underwent a change—a great and mysterious change—is a truth which a little reflection will constrain us to admit. As '*bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh*,' His corporeal powers, before His ascension, were precisely similar to our own. But Scripture clearly teaches that a great and marvellous transformation was effected upon His body when He entered the mansions of glory, where He now reigns as King and Head of His Church. God has crowned Him with glory and majesty, and seated Him at His right hand, as far above the honour and happiness of all creatures as the heaven, where He receives the homage of angels and glorified saints, is exalted above the earth on which He suffered and died. His resurrection and ascension; the glorification of His body, and His station at the right hand of His Father; the glory that accrued to Him from His redeeming work; and the worship that was paid to Him, were so many steps in the ladder that led from the depths of His humiliation to the exalted position that He now occupies.

Such is the power with which Christ is invested, as He

sits on His mediatorial throne, that at His name every knee shall bow; in other words, that the intelligent universe shall acknowledge His authority, either in willing obedience or forced submission. The term *things*, in this passage, may as correctly be rendered persons; and we are thus taught that individuals in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, shall pay homage to the Redeemer. The intelligences in heaven who ascribe praise to Christ are angels and the glorified spirits of the redeemed from among men. Angels worshipped Him before He assumed the nature of man. They worshipped Him as God—as their Creator, to whom they owed their existence—as their Preserver, to whom they were indebted for all the happiness which they possessed —as that glorious Being whose power, majesty, wisdom, and holiness are infinite.

But after the Redeemer's ascension, while angels would still, as they had done before, worship Him for the divine attributes which He possessed, there were new and additional grounds on which He now claimed their homage. Though the blessings that flow from Christ's death were not purchased directly for *them*, still, in the development of the plan of human redemption, a more illustrious display of the divine glory was exhibited than they had ever witnessed before. During His humiliation, earth was a theatre on which they transfixed their gaze, and beheld a new lustre imparted to every attribute of Jehovah's character. Then they saw His holiness in the fulness of its purity, His truth in its unchanging fidelity, His justice in its inflexible rectitude, and above all, His love in its unfathomable depths. While, therefore, as before His incarnation, they adore Him as God, there are now additional grounds on which they ascribe homage to His name. As the Redeemer of our fallen race, they worship Him for the displays of divine glory which were furnished by His incarnation, sufferings, and death.

By *persons in heaven* we are also to understand the ransomed and glorified members of the human family in the celestial world. They blend their voices with those of angels in ascribing praise to the name of the Redeemer. As they contemplate Him in all the glories of His person, and as the author of the eternal happiness which they enjoy, He is the object of their supreme love and adoration. As they look back on the state of helplessness and sin in which divine grace found them, when, as occupants of this fallen world, they were exposed to the divine wrath and vengeance; as they reflect on the saving influences which He brought to bear upon them, whereby they were led to exercise faith in Him, and thus escape the consequences of their guilt; as they think of the moral renovation that was effected in their nature by His Spirit, and which produced in them a resemblance to His own spotless image; as they view the happiness which, as the result of His mediation, they now enjoy, and will be ever increasing as the ages of eternity roll on,—sentiments of intense gratitude fill their minds as they sing the song, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.'

Persons on earth are also said to bow the knee at the name of the exalted Redeemer. Already multitudes of the human race acknowledge Him as their Saviour and King. Many have enlisted in the great army of which He is the Captain, and placed themselves under His sway. And although millions of the descendants of Adam are either ignorant of the gospel or despise its offer, still the whole world is, in one sense, subject to Him. He rules as King among the nations. As the God of providence, all events are under His control. He can set up kingdoms and overturn them at His pleasure. Princes and emperors may form a thousand plans to further their own ambitious ends,

but He, in His wisdom, can so control them that they shall advance His glory and the welfare of His Church. Prophecy distinctly intimates that a time is coming when, in every land, mankind shall embrace His gospel, and the whole earth shall bow to His sway.

Persons under the earth, the apostle further says, shall bow the knee to Christ. By the phrase *under the earth* we are to understand hell; and the persons spoken of are devils and the lost spirits of mankind. They must bow to the name of Christ, and acknowledge His authority. The meaning is not that they shall be saved, and yield to the Redeemer willing and loving homage. They are lost, and shall be eternally lost. But though they entertain towards Christ feelings of enmity, they must bow to His sway, and confess themselves subject to His power. Hell, as a part of the universe, is under the control and dominion of Jesus.

In view of the power and glory now possessed by the Redeemer, let me seek to have my heart impressed with feelings of profound reverence. He who became a man, and died on the cross to save me, is possessed of infinite and almighty power, and all the resources of the universe are at His disposal. As I contemplate the glory and majesty of His person, let me delight to avow myself a willing and obedient subject of His kingdom. However great may be the number of my spiritual enemies, His power can defend me from their attacks. Let me, in the exercise of implicit trust, commit my soul to Him, and in view of His transcendent glory, adore Him with a loving and grateful heart. While I seek now to have a lively impression of His kingly majesty, let me reflect on the lustre with which His glories are beheld in the celestial world. Here, in a small province of His mighty empire, I can but dimly see an outline of the honours that adorn His person; but in heaven I shall see Him as He is, seated on His exalted throne, and the object of adoration to myriads of holy and intelligent beings.

What rapture shall fill my soul, when I am admitted to the ranks of the redeemed, as I hear a song of praise rising from so many tongues to the name of Him who, from love to the souls of men, veiled His divinity beneath a human form, and died upon a cross!

'Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity!

'His reign shall know no end,
And round His piercèd feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend,
Their fragrance ever sweet.

'All hail! Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.'—BRIDGES.

VII.

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE IN HEAVEN.

'Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.'—1 COR. XIII. 12.

'NOW I know in part,' says the apostle; and such a sentiment, coming from his pen, indicated his deep humility. He was not ashamed to own the imperfection of his present knowledge. His attainments as a scholar were of a high order. He had been brought up at Tarsus, a city so famed for its learning that the tutors of some of the Roman emperors were taken from its schools. In addition to the secular knowledge which he had there acquired, he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and, with that celebrated teacher, had studied the doctrines and mysteries of religion. But the contemplation of his acquirements, instead of puffing him up with pride, served only to humble him. Of the great range of truth which, in the future world, is grasped by the mental vision of the glorified saint, he owned that he knew but a part.

The experience of Paul is the experience of every believer. The more he studies the character and works of God; the more he contemplates the seeming anomalies that take place in Providence; the more he investigates the system of divine truth exhibited in the volume of revelation, the more is he impressed with the littleness of his knowledge, and the more earnestly does he pant for the hour that shall find him transported from the mists of time to the clear and unclouded light of eternity.

On every subject that can occupy our attention we know

but in part. There is much, for example, in the works of creation that transcends the human understanding. Science has sedulously laboured, and laboured in many instances with success, to explain the phenomena that are exhibited in the operations of nature. In this way much light has been shed on many subjects which would otherwise have been wrapped in mystery to the mind of man. Newton's discovery of the law of gravitation, for instance, has explained on satisfactory principles the regularity which characterizes the movements of the planetary system. The telescope has enabled the astronomer to solve many of the difficulties connected with the appearances of the heavenly bodies, which baffled the researches of science in bygone ages. The striking discoveries of geology have extended our knowledge regarding the structure of the earth, and revealed the changes which have taken place on its surface before it was fitted for the abode of man. Geography is ever enlarging its limits. Islands and continents, of whose climate and productions past generations knew nothing, are opened up by the enterprise of modern travel and research.

But while science in all its departments is ever widening the range of discovery, how little does man know, even after he has expended all his diligence and ingenuity! Sir Isaac Newton, the most profound philosopher that ever lived, declared that, after all the knowledge he had acquired, he was like a schoolboy gathering a few pebbles on the shore, while the great ocean of truth lay unrevealed before him. Astronomers can tell the size of the planets, and their distance from the sun; but how little do they know of their structure! Are they inhabited? If inhabited, what kind of beings occupy them? Are they rational and intelligent beings, formed, like man, after the image of the Creator? Are they holy beings, who yield an implicit compliance with the laws of Heaven? Or have they, like the human race, sinned against God and lost His favour? These, and many

questions of a similar character, the mind of man may suggest, but science can give no satisfactory answer to them. Even many mysteries connected with objects on our own earth science cannot unravel. How much, for example, yet remains to be known of the laws of galvanism, electricity, and meteorology! In all the departments of nature there are difficulties which the ingenuity of man cannot solve. Human discovery has its limits, and beyond these God says, *Thou shalt not go.*

Our present knowledge is imperfect with regard to the arrangements of Providence. Here, as in creation, there are many things which to us appear mysterious and inexplicable: 'Often is the way of the Lord in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known.' Many illustrations of the apparent anomalies of Providence are exhibited in the word of God. How inconsistent, for example, with the justice and benevolence of the divine character must some of the commands given by God to Abraham have seemed to the patriarch before he comprehended the design contemplated by them! The vicissitudes that occurred in the life of Joseph were so many steps in Providence by which he ascended to a position of distinguished honour; but in the calamities that successively befell him, those around him would recognise only the agency of man. The suffering to which the children of Israel were subjected in Egypt was overruled for their spiritual good, and served to prepare them for the revelations that were afterwards made to them; but during the period of their captivity, their views of God's character were so clouded that they ceased to regard themselves as the objects of His favour.

If we trace the page of history, many occurrences will, to our dim vision, appear dark and at variance with the divine wisdom. How strange, for example, the persecutions which God has allowed the enemies of His people,

at different times, to wage against them! How mysterious that such an amount of corruption should prevail in the Church, and that its great Head should permit the doctrines of His word to be so overlaid with superstition, that they have frequently been hid from the view of the inquiring sinner! How marvellous, that while some portions of our globe have been blessed with the light of gospel truth, whole nations have for ages been sunk in the darkness of heathenism! In the daily experience of human life, events are constantly transpiring which constrain us to pause and wonder as we try to comprehend the purpose which they are designed to serve in the great economy of Providence. The father of a young and helpless family, who are dependent upon his daily labour for their support, is cut off by death, and they at once exchange comfort for pinching poverty, which perhaps consigns some of them to a premature grave. A youth, in whom the hopes of his parents are centred, and who bids fair to pursue a career upon which they will look with pride, is attacked by some wasting disease, which in a few months consigns him to the narrow house appointed for all living; while, in the adjoining dwelling, there is an aged cripple whose days are lengthened out, although he is a burden to himself and all around him. A missionary of the cross, who has been instrumental in bringing multitudes of immortal souls to a knowledge of salvation, and who, humanly speaking, could but ill be spared to the Church and the world, falls a prey to the last enemy; while a priest of error, whose great aim is to delude the minds of his fellow-men, is allowed to continue his efforts for the subversion of the truth. These and similar dispensations are, to our present limited vision, dark and perplexing, and we can only say respecting them: 'How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!'

Our present knowledge is imperfect with regard to the

doctrines of revealed religion. In the Bible, many truths are exhibited with such clearness that they may be comprehended by a child. Such, for example, are the existence of God, the depravity of man, the divinity of Christ, the work of redemption, the operations of the Spirit, the rewards and punishments of the future world. But simply though these and similar doctrines are unfolded, there are aspects in which they may be contemplated, and questions may be raised respecting them, which surround them, to our circumscribed view, with mystery. Take, for example, the doctrine of the divine existence. While it is clearly unfolded in the word of God, and while it may be inferred from traces of design in the works of external nature, still we are at a loss to comprehend how a being could exist from eternity. Angels had a beginning; man had a beginning; every object in nature had a beginning; but how God should exist without a beginning is a question which it baffles human reason to answer. Again, the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ is a doctrine clearly unfolded in the word of God, and which, as Christians, it is our duty implicitly to receive. But the nature of that union, the way in which it was effected, and the manner in which it now operates, are points of difficulty about which we may raise conjectures, but of which we can give no satisfactory solution. The decrees of God affecting the salvation of a portion of the human family are again and again referred to in the volume of revelation. But the reasons on which these decrees are founded we cannot trace, for they are utterly beyond our knowledge. These are some of the doctrines whose meaning in all their length and breadth we cannot comprehend, and regarding which it becomes us, in the present imperfect state of our faculties, to exercise the faith of little children. There are mysteries in revealed religion, and, regarding these mysteries, we can only rest satisfied with the assurance, that what we know

not now we shall know hereafter—that what is now dark shall one day be made light—and that what we now see through a glass darkly shall then be beheld with unclouded vision.

While the apostle owned the imperfection of his earthly knowledge, he anticipated that, in the heavenly world, his views of divine truth should be indefinitely enlarged: *then shall I know even as also I am known.* His meaning is, that in eternity his knowledge would bear a resemblance to the clear and unclouded knowledge which God possessed of his character and doings. His language intimates that he expected in the realms of bliss to stand in the immediate presence of those grand realities which on earth he only saw dimly, through the imperfect medium of faith.

In the celestial world, the Christian's knowledge will be indefinitely enlarged on all those subjects that now come within the range of his study, but which on earth he but feebly comprehends. Not only will his present faculties be strengthened, but doubtless new powers will be imparted to his mind, which shall enable him to acquire information with a readiness that shall strikingly contrast with the slow and tedious process by which, on earth, he pursued his inquiries after truth. Dwelling in the presence of God Himself, he shall draw his stores of knowledge direct from the great fountain of wisdom. Angels will be his fellow-students. And when we reflect that these exalted intelligences have, from the hour of their creation, been enlarging their views of Jehovah's character and perfections, what advantage will fellowship with them impart to the glorified believer, as he contemplates the development of those truths of which, when only an heir of eternal bliss, he possessed but the germ! His knowledge of God's glory, as exhibited in His works, will then be indefinitely increased. If the astronomer is lost in awe and wonder as he gazes from this insignificant planet through his telescope, and contemplates

the displays of power and wisdom which the heavenly bodies present, what enlarged views of the divine majesty will the glorified believer possess as his eye ranges over creation, even to its utmost bounds, and beholds in every operation a proof of his Father's benevolence and skill! The saint's knowledge of the divine procedure, as exhibited in the works of providence, will, in the celestial world, be greatly expanded. Events, which now seem complex and anomalous, will then appear to have been characterized by unerring wisdom and tender compassion. Trials, which on earth oppressed and grieved him, shall, when viewed in relation to their design and result, awaken songs of deepest gratitude. His knowledge of the system of truths propounded in the volume of revelation shall, in the future world, be indefinitely enlarged. How clear and distinct will be his views of the character and perfections of Jehovah, the glory of Christ's person, the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, the great mysteries of redemption, and the importance of the blessings that were secured by faith! The glass through which he now sees spiritual things darkly shall then be withdrawn, and *he shall know even as he is known.*

In view of the expectation that my knowledge in the heavenly world will be infinitely extended, let me prize what I already possess. While there are many subjects in nature, providence, and grace, which I cannot fully comprehend, there are truths so clearly unfolded that they may be understood even amid the imperfections of the present state. In the Bible, doctrines are exhibited, duties inculcated, and motives to holy action presented with such distinctness that *he who runs may read.* The word of God does not, indeed, contain all the knowledge which man might desire to possess. It was not intended, for example, to teach the sciences or the arts of life; but it reveals truths which are the germ of what eternity will be occupied in

developing. These truths are rays of that resplendent light which shall irradiate the soul of the glorified saint in the realms of bliss. Let me, then, value the knowledge which the Bible unfolds; let me make it my study; and let my earnest prayer be, that my mind may be so enlightened by it that I may, in some measure, be prepared for association with the exalted intelligences who dwell in God's presence and behold His glory.

'Beyond the sun and moon I lift my gaze,
Where round Thy throne a purer light is spread,
Where seraphs fill their urns from that bright blaze,
And angels' souls with holy fires are fed.
Oh! send from that pure fount one quickening ray,
And change these inward shades to bright and glorious day.'

UPHAM.

VIII.

FULNESS OF JOY.

'In Thy presence is fulness of joy.'—Ps. xvi. 11.

HOWEVER dim may be the ideas of the believer respecting the glories of the celestial world, this sentiment of the Psalmist is one to which, without hesitation, he gives his assent. He knows that, if anywhere in the wide universe fulness of joy is experienced, it must be in the divine presence. Even amid the sins and imperfections of earth, he finds that true happiness results from loving God and holding fellowship with Him. What, then, must be the bliss of that world where the saints stand in His immediate presence, and are admitted to intimate communion with Him!

The fulness of joy which is experienced in the presence of Jehovah results, in the first place, from the enlarged views of His character which are there possessed. On earth, the highest knowledge which we acquire of the divine nature and attributes is limited and imperfect. After the most diligent study of His perfections, as these are reflected in His works and in His word, we are constrained to exclaim, with Job, 'Oh that I knew where I might find Him!' We admire His glory, as that is exhibited in the wide range of objects that meet our gaze. The glowing splendour of the noonday sun, the silvery moon shedding her soft light to relieve the gloom of midnight, the stars in countless myriads emitting their sparkling lustre over the wide expanse of heaven,—all proclaim the power and wisdom of the great Architect who called them into being, and im-

parted to them their beauty and magnificence. If from the firmament above us we contemplate the earth on which we dwell, what numberless proofs meet our gaze of the might and skill of Jehovah, who at first hung that earth upon nothing, and has all along guided and controlled its movements! The everlasting hills, clad each returning year with verdure; the majestic ocean, with its myriads of finny inhabitants; man himself, so fearfully and so wonderfully made, and possessed of faculties which, even in his fallen condition, proclaim the high position assigned to him in creation,—all testify to the glory of that Being who fills immensity with His presence.

But while, with the faculties with which we have been endowed, we can infer some of the perfections of Jehovah, how little do we know of His essential glory! Oftentimes, while engaged in the contemplation of His character, is the truth suggested to our minds, that clouds and darkness are round about Him, and that He is a God who hideth Himself. The magnificence of creation is but the outer fringe of that resplendent glory which constrains angels in the heaven of heavens to veil their faces with their wings and cast their crowns at His feet. The views of His glory and perfections, as exhibited in the volume of His word, are indeed clearer and more tangible than the impressions gathered from the works of nature. There His mercy, as displayed to our fallen world, is seen throwing a halo of lustre around His other perfections. But still, even with the volume of revelation in our hand, the knowledge which we acquire of the divine character is as a few streaks of light in the early dawn, compared with the splendour of the manifestations which shall be made when faith has given place to sight. When the glorified believer takes his stand before the great *I am*, what discoveries will be unfolded of His glory and perfections! What feelings of reverence will fill his mind as he finds himself at the centre

of that power which controls the movements of creation even to its utmost limits! While, however, the majesty of Jehovah's presence will awaken sentiments of awe, the infinite love which is seen mellowing all the perfections of His character will inspire filial confidence. Once the believer was far off, and alienated from God in his mind and by wicked works; but having been led to exercise faith in Christ, he became reconciled; and when, a ransomed and glorified saint, he stands before the eternal throne, he shall be able, to some extent, to fathom the depths of that love which saved him from sin, and raised him to the position that he now occupies. In converse with Jehovah, what a flood of light will be poured on the workings of Providence in preparing the heirs of glory for their immortal inheritance! The saint will then discover that trials and afflictions, crosses and bereavements, disappointments and reverses, were among the all things that were controlled by unerring wisdom to prepare him for the pure and exalted services of eternity. Fulness of joy will thus be experienced as the intellectual faculties, not only glorified but strengthened, shall contemplate the perfection of God's character and the wisdom of His procedure.

Again, in the presence of God there is fulness of joy, as the saints there attain to perfect holiness of character. Purity and bliss are related to each other as cause and effect. God Himself is the great fountain of joy, but His holiness is the foundation of His happiness. Angels are holy, and, as a consequence, are strangers to sorrow and misery. Man, when he came from the hands of his Creator, was distinguished by unsullied purity, and, so long as he continued in innocence, was the possessor of uninterrupted felicity. But by the introduction of sin into the world, the image of God was effaced from his soul, and, having lost his resemblance to the divine character,

he became a stranger to true happiness. His will, instead of acting in harmony with the divine will, was raised in defiance against it; his affections, instead of being placed on the Author of his being, were alienated from Him; while his desires, instead of centring on objects heavenly and eternal, were directed only to things earthly and sensual. The heart became the seat of unholy passions, which, like vipers, inflicted a deadly sting, and poisoned all the springs of enjoyment.

The great design of the plan of redemption wrought out by Christ is not only to deliver man from the guilt of sin, but to restore to him that happiness which he forfeited. When that redemption is received by faith, and the sinner becomes united to God through Christ, he begins to realize in some measure the bliss that was enjoyed in Eden when man lived in innocence and in possession of the divine favour. Just in proportion as the work of regeneration advances in the soul, and he becomes conformed to the image of Christ, does he taste of that bliss which the world can neither give nor take away. Grace in the heart imparts a joy which is the earnest and foretaste of the pure and uninterrupted bliss which flows in a perennial stream from the throne of God in the celestial world. The happiness which the believer experiences on earth, however, is imperfect, because the work of holiness is incomplete. Never, on this side the grave, does he gain an entire mastery over sin and temptation; and thus the hopes of coming bliss that animate his breast are often beclouded by distressing doubts and fears.

But in the presence of God sin is unknown; the saints, ransomed from guilt, breathe only an atmosphere of holiness. Their characters shall reflect the spotless purity of the divine nature. Christ will present them before the Father without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. The Holy Spirit, whose office it was to regenerate their moral

nature, shall now regard with satisfaction the completion of that work which was begun amid the vicissitudes of earth and time. With their characters perfected in holiness, and from which every vestige of sin has been removed, they shall not only resemble God, but be partakers of His bliss. The unholy passions of envy, jealousy, and revenge, which cause such wide-spread misery on earth, will be unknown there. The sorrows, trials, and bereavements which so frequently desolate the heart in this world of sin will never be experienced there. The coldness that, on account of sin, often characterizes devotion, and bars fellowship with Jehovah, will never be felt there. With no cloud of sin hanging over the conscience, and hiding from the view the glories of Messiah's character, communion with Him will be close and intimate. Freed from sin, and with their natures made perfectly holy, the saints, as they stand in the presence of God, will possess *fulness of joy*.

Other elements will combine to make up the fulness of joy which shall be experienced by the saints in the presence of Jehovah. Their sublime employments, the ardour of their worship, converse with angels and glorified men from every age and clime, the thought ever present to their minds that their joys will never terminate, will be among the materials that shall constitute the completion of their bliss.

Do I, through grace, entertain the hope of dwelling in the presence of God, where fulness of joy is experienced? Then, as a preparation for my high destiny, let me seek to enjoy much of that presence on earth. Here, indeed, the glory of Jehovah is but dimly beheld, and fellowship with Him can never be so close and intimate as in the realms of bliss. But still I can trace His power as displayed in creation, His wisdom in the arrangements of Providence, and above all, His mercy in the revelation of His word. Let me make His character my study; let His will be the

ruling principle of my life; let me strive after assimilation to His image; let me turn from sin, as the abominable thing which He hates, and cultivate holiness, without which no man can dwell in His presence. Above all, let me seek union to Him through Christ, that thus I may look up to Him as a reconciled Father, and claim the title to eternal life, which is His gift to all who believe.

'What no human eye hath seen,
What no mortal ear hath heard,
What on thought hath never been
In its noblest flights conferred—
This hath God prepared in store
For His people evermore.

'Heavenly landscapes, calmly bright;
Life's pure river, murmuring low;
Forms of loveliness and light,
Lost to earth long time ago—
Yes, mine own, lamented long,
Shine amid the angel throng!'

IX.

THE GLORIFIED BODY.

'How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?'
—1 COR. v. 35.

THE resurrection of the body is a fit theme of meditation to the believer, in connection with his hope of everlasting glory. At the hour of death, the soul does not lose its consciousness, but is at once admitted to the world of bliss, there to enjoy intimate communion with the God who gave it. The happiness of the spiritual part of man, however, will not be complete till it is re-united to the body, on that morning which shall see every grave, at the call of Christ's all-powerful voice, give up its dead. How important it is, therefore, that, as we stand on Pisgah and view the glories of the celestial Canaan, we should possess enlightened and scriptural views of the resurrection, and the nature of the corporeal powers which are to be the medium of conveying felicity to the soul through the ages of a blessed eternity!

The resurrection of the body is a doctrine peculiar to revelation. Apart from the teaching of the word of God respecting it, the idea that the material part of the human constitution, after it has mouldered for ages in the dust, should awake to life, would probably never have occurred to the mind of man. The doctrine of a future state was indeed taught by Pagan philosophers; that the soul will survive the body when death separates them, is an article of belief among many heathen nations. But to the page of inspiration is due the credit of first propounding the fact

that the body shall rise again and become immortal. Even the saints of Old Testament times believed in the doctrine, and rejoiced in the comforting hopes which it inspires. The Psalmist speaks of his *flesh resting in hope and awaking in God's likeness.* Daniel asserts that *many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* Job, who lived at an early age of the world's history, exulted in the prospect of the resurrection: 'For I know,' said he, 'that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.' The full disclosure of this truth, however, was reserved for the gospel dispensation; and the resurrection of Christ Himself was the crowning attestation of it. No doubt or uncertainty hangs over the utterances of the apostles when they unfold this doctrine. Paul, who had been caught up to the third heavens, and instructed in the eternal realities of the Christian faith, speaks with unwavering confidence of the time when, *as Christ rose, so shall all His followers rise:* 'If Christ,' says he, 'be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

All the difficulties that suggest themselves to the mind of man in connection with the doctrine of the resurrection are at once met by a reference to the unlimited power of God. The Almighty, whose fiat called the universe into being, who peopled immensity with suns and systems, who controls the movements of the myriads of orbs that float through the depths of space, can reanimate the body of man, even though it should moulder for centuries or millenniums in the grave. While the power of all created beings is limited, the power of God, like all His other attributes, is infinite; and, therefore, an appropriate reply to those who deny the

doctrine is found in the address of Christ to the Sadducees: 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.' Connected with this fundamental truth of the Christian revelation, the infidel will sometimes be heard proposing such a question as the following:—How will God at the day of judgment be able to gather together the scattered particles of bodies, when they have been consumed by fire and scattered to the four winds of heaven, or devoured by cannibals, and thus formed constituent parts in the bodies of other animals? To such a caviller it would be sufficient to reply, Can you tell us how God changes the caterpillar into the beautifully-painted butterfly? how He converts the bleak of winter into the verdure of summer? how, from a rotting seed deposited in the ground, He produces the living plant or flower, with its stems, buds, or blossoms?

On the nature of the body which shall be raised at the resurrection, it is impossible to speak with precision so long as we are encompassed with the darkness and infirmity of earth. What resemblance it will bear to the body as it existed before death is a point on which Scripture furnishes no information. One circumstance may with certainty be predicated respecting it, and that is, that notwithstanding a difference of organization, it will be recognised as identical with the present body. Paul illustrates the subject by comparing it with seed deposited in the ground, which germinates, and produces grain similar to the seed. Though the greater part of the seed thus buried in the earth rots and becomes useless, there may be discovered in that seed, by the aid of a powerful microscope, an embryo of the future plant, which time will develope. It may be that at the resurrection only a small part of our present material frame will be resuscitated, but still the soul will regard the glorified body as identical with that which it occupied during the period of its earthly probation. Judging from the hints which Scripture gives on the point, we are led to form the

most exalted conceptions of what the new and refined body shall be. We are told that it shall no longer be an animal body, but a spiritual body, fitted to dwell in a world which flesh and blood cannot enter, assimilated in nature to the immortal essence which shall dwell within it. The body which believers possess on earth is a body defiled by corruption and sin. Not only has guilt effaced the image of the Creator which was reflected on the soul; it has affected the structure of the corporeal tenement. The body is subject to toil, hardship, and suffering; disease undermines the vitality of its functions; and, sooner or later, it falls a prey to the last enemy. But the bodies of the saints, though laid in the noisome grave, and mouldering to decay, do not cease to be the objects of the Redeemer's care; their very dust is precious in His sight. Amid all the glory that now encircles Him, He will not cease to watch over it; and then, on the morning of the Great Assize, it shall be raised to life renewed, and again become the tenement of immortal spirits. As temples of the Holy Ghost, the bodies of believers shall not always lie in ruins; their scattered parts shall be collected, and moulded into an imperishable form of symmetry and beauty.

The most exalted view which Scripture gives of the resurrection body of the believer is that which represents it as resembling the glorified humanity of Christ. That the Redeemer's body, at His ascension, underwent a great and important change will not for a moment be doubted. He once occupied a perishable body, in form and nature precisely similar to our own vile body. But as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, it cannot be supposed that He ascended to heaven in that body just as it had existed upon earth. What was the nature of the change that was wrought upon it Scripture does not reveal; it is simply termed a *glorious change*. But when we reflect that the Saviour's body is the medium through which the

glory of His divinity is exhibited in the heavenly world, we are warranted in forming the most exalted conceptions of what that body in its glorified state now is. Now, on the morning of the resurrection, the bodies of believers shall not only be endued with vitality, but fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. They shall then be acknowledged as His younger brethren, and their form and appearance will attest the relation that they bear to Him. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.'

Let the prospect of the resurrection, and the glorious change that shall then be wrought upon the bodies of believers, awaken in my mind an anxious concern to be united to Christ by faith now, so that I may rank among His people on that day. If found at His right hand, I shall not only be welcomed to eternal bliss, but shall bear a close resemblance to Him. As my body, though it shall moulder for ages in the dust, is, if I am indeed a child of God, a temple of the Holy Ghost, let my earnest prayer be that all its powers may be sanctified and consecrated to the Redeemer's glory. In the hope of the glorious change that shall be wrought upon me on the morning of the resurrection, let me banish from my mind all undue concern about the wants of the body. What matters it though suffering and affliction befall it in time, if, at Christ's second coming, it be fashioned into a resemblance to His glorified humanity, and its powers become avenues of the most refined enjoyment to the soul through the ages of a blessed eternity. I cannot foresee the circumstances that shall attend my departure from the world, nor do I know the spot in which my dust shall repose—it may be in my native land, alongside the remains of relatives and friends; it may be in a region remote from home and kindred; or it may be in the depths of ocean. But it shall be watched over

by the Redeemer till the morning of the resurrection, when, at the sound of the last trumpet, it shall awake to life, and be borne by angelic messengers to its appointed place in the Paradise of God.

'Soon shall the trump of God
Give out the welcome sound,
That shakes the silent chamber walls,
And breaks the turf-sealed ground.

'Ye dwellers in the dust,
Awake, come forth, and sing!
Sharp has your frost of winter been,
But bright shall be your spring.

''Twas sown in weakness here,
'Twill then be raised in power;
That which was sown an earthly seed
Shall rise a heavenly flower.'—BONAR.

X.

GLORIFIED CHILDREN IN HEAVEN.

'Your little ones, and your children, who had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither; and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.'—DEUT. I. 39.

SUCH was the address of Moses to the Israelites in connection with the entrance of the nation into Canaan. Of the multitude who came out of Egypt, only two individuals, Caleb and Joshua, were privileged to cross the Jordan, and plant their feet on the goodly land which had been promised to their father Abraham. While, however, the dust of the parents was left behind in the wilderness, the little ones, their children, were not to be excluded from the blissful inheritance. They were to go in to possess the land which, in after ages, was to be trodden by the feet of Him who should appear as the Light of the world, and proclaim Himself the Saviour of men.

The entrance of these little ones into the earthly Canaan suggests another scene, of infinitely greater interest and importance,—the entrance of the vast numbers who die in infancy into the glory of the celestial Canaan. It is a startling fact, that one-half of the human family are cut off by death before they cross the years of childhood. The departure of such multitudes from earth, when they have only begun to mingle in its scenes and enjoyments, is one of the dark mysteries that hang over the doings of Providence, and which neither the light of reason, nor the more brilliant light of revelation, enables us to unravel. In connection with the death of these little ones, the interesting

and important question arises, What position is assigned to them in the spirit-world? We miss the sound of their merry voices; memory treasures up the record of their sayings and doings; the sight of their books and toys causes the tear to trickle down the cheek of the bereaved parent; the contracted mound in the churchyard points out the spot where their dust reposes. But fancy strives to follow them across the boundary-line that separates time from eternity, and descry the region in the wide universe which they occupy. Blessed be God, His word, if it does not in express language intimate that all who die in childhood are saved, affords us firm ground on which to hope that such is the blessed result.

One evidence that all who die in childhood are admitted to the celestial world is founded on the fact, that, in all the representations which Scripture gives of hell, it is spoken of as the place of punishment only for actual sin; and consequently, as children have no actual sin, the pit of woe is not the region to which they can justly be consigned. They have, indeed, original sin, which has come down to them as an inheritance from the first parents of the race; but in all the descriptions which the Bible gives of future punishment, it is not in one case said to be inflicted for original sin. Thus, for example, when Christ, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, speaks of the wicked going away into everlasting punishment, He expressly says that they shall be consigned to it for positive and wilful neglect of duty. If, then, hell is not the place to which those dying in childhood are sent, their residence must be in heaven; for, excepting these two regions, the Bible names no other which mankind enter at the hour of death. This view gains support from the tender language which the Almighty employed with reference to the children whom the Israelites, in a time of idolatry, had sacrificed to Moloch. He speaks of their having filled the valley of Hinnom

with the blood of 'innocents.' Let it be remembered that these children were now dead; and can it for a moment be supposed that God, who remonstrated with the parents for shedding the blood of their little ones, and whom He denominated *innocents*, had Himself consigned them to perdition. The very thought is blasphemous and revolting.

Among the positive evidences that those dying in infancy are saved, the language of David with reference to his deceased child is often cited. The touching narrative of the royal Psalmist's grief is found in 2 Sam. xii. 13–24, and no bereaved Christian parent can read it without deriving from it the consolation which his bleeding heart requires. As the illness of the child increased, and fears were entertained that death was soon to terminate his sufferings, the agony of the father was so intense, that when the little one breathed his last the attendants were afraid to convey to him the intelligence of the fact. When, however, the announcement was made to him that the infant was dead, he sought to draw from his religion the consolation which it was fitted to inspire. He did not mourn as those who have no hope. Knowing that the child was dead, and that his mortal remains would soon return to dust, his thoughts went forward to the period of his own dissolution, and, with certain hope, contemplated a reunion with his spirit of the little one amid the bliss of the divine presence. His language touches a chord which vibrates in the heart of every Christian parent who has been bereft of little children. 'But, now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.' That those words refer to the hope of David that he should meet his child in the eternal home of the redeemed, cannot for a moment be doubted. It is also to be borne in mind that David, as a man divinely inspired, possessed clear views of the doctrine of a future state, as is evident from the sentiments that are found in

his psalms. How beautifully, for example, does he depict the reality of celestial bliss in such passages as the following:—'In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Ps. xvi. 11); 'As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness' (Ps. xvii. 15). The narrative of David's bereavement, and the hope that sustained him under it, are given in Scripture that believing parents, whose hearts are wrung with sorrow by the loss of their little ones, may draw comfort from the thought, that the loved members of their family circle whose faces they miss they shall again meet where parting is unknown.

The tender affection which Christ exhibited for children, and the gracious words that He uttered respecting them, furnish the most consoling evidence in favour of the view that all who die in infancy are saved. The evangelist informs us that, on one occasion, children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and bless them. The disciples, imagining that such little ones were unworthy of their Master's notice, sought to drive them away from Him. How widely different was the disposition which Christ exhibited towards them! He invited them to His presence, took them up in His arms, placed His hands upon them, and uttered the cheering declaration respecting them, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.' As we stand amid the light reflected from this passage in the Redeemer's earthly history, we seem, as it were, to see the portals of heaven opened to receive the spirits of the little ones whom death has numbered among its victims. Had any of these children who were brought to Jesus died shortly after, can we imagine that, when He blessed them in life, He would have cursed them in death? Can it be thought that those lips, which uttered the loving invitation to the little ones, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not,' should have pronounced over them

the doom, 'Depart from me, ye cursed'? Banish the thought, as unworthy to be entertained of Him whose life on earth was an incarnation of love.

Not less encouraging was Christ's treatment of these children, than was the gracious declaration which He uttered respecting them: 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.' The phrase, 'the kingdom of heaven,' frequently signifies the Church on earth, but it also includes in its reference the celestial world. The comforting truth is thus taught by Christ, that the Church Triumphant is largely to be composed of babes—

> 'Who, thither caught from womb and breast,
> Claim right to sing above the rest;
> Because they find the happy shore
> They never saw nor sought before.'

It is thus evident from the teaching of the word of God, that the multitudes of the human family who die in infancy are not lost, but made participants of celestial bliss. Though they were incapable of exercising faith in Christ, their salvation is, in some way, to be ascribed to His mediation; and they, with others who shall compose the general assembly and Church of the first-born, shall join in singing the song, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!'

Surrounded as we are by the mists and imperfections of earth, it is impossible for us to realize the measure of bliss of which glorified children are put in possession when they are admitted to the joys of the Redeemer's presence. We may rest assured, however, that whatever be the positions which they occupy, felicity suited to their ransomed nature will be their portion. Their diadems may not be so bright, nor their stations so exalted, as those of Paul, John, and other distinguished servants of the Redeemer, who were

instrumental in adding many jewels to His crown; but their happiness, from the moment of their entrance into Paradise, will infinitely transcend the highest enjoyments of earth and time. Their intellectual faculties will at once be enlarged, and rendered capable of comprehending the glories of the divine character, and the grandeur of the plan of salvation to which they owe the eternity of bliss that is in store for them. Just as a child on the summit of a mountain has a more extended view of the surrounding scenery than a philosopher at its base, so the little ones removed from the storms and sufferings of earth will, as they take their stand on the heights of glory, understand more of the works of God, the mysteries of Providence, and the results of Christ's mediatorial work, than theologians who have devoted to these themes a lifetime of study. What rich sources of happiness will be opened up to their glorified natures as they dwell in the immediate presence of the Redeemer and amid the outflowings of His love! When the believing parents of these ransomed ones quit the scenes of earth and time, and are admitted within the portals of the celestial world, may we not suppose that they will be the first to welcome them to their eternal abode? The mother may not, at first sight, recognise her now glorified child, whom she last beheld stretched on a bed of agony, or laid a lifeless corpse in the little coffin; but soon she will learn whose is the loving voice that addresses her. 'Ah! mother,' we can imagine him saying, 'well do I remember the tears of sorrow that trickled down your cheeks as you saw me in the last agonies of death, and bade me farewell. Could you then have realized what you now behold,—the cloudless bliss of the world to which I was admitted,—would not your mourning have been turned into gladness as you thought of the glorious transition which your child had made from a vale of tears to a region of unsullied joy? The years which I would have spent

upon earth, had your wishes regarding me been granted, might have been years of sorrow and tribulation; but death terminated my sufferings, and admitted me to the glories which you now behold.'

Have I had to mourn over the loss of little ones, who were either my own children or those of dear relatives? Let the views which have now been presented of the bliss which they now possess comfort me under the trying bereavement. Bitter was the pang which filled my bosom as I saw their eyes closed in death; but let joy mingle with my tears as I think of the bliss which they now enjoy, and the exalted society to which they have been admitted. Only a few tosses on the billows of time they experienced, when they entered the haven of eternal peace. Had their lives been spared, they might, perhaps, have fallen before temptation, and thus blasted the fond hopes which friends entertained regarding them. But now they dwell in the presence of the Redeemer, and reflect His image; and no taint of sin shall ever defile the spotless purity of their nature. On earth, they could only, after years of study, have comprehended but feebly the elements of divine truth exhibited in the volume of inspiration. In heaven, the character of God, without an intervening cloud, is unfolded to their enraptured gaze; while, with angels as their fellow-students, what enlarged ideas will they obtain of every subject that comes within the range of their vision! In view of the happiness which they now enjoy, let me say with David, 'I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me.'

'I heard the angels singing
As they went up through the sky,
A sweet infant's spirit bringing
To its Father's house on high:
Happy thou, so soon ascended,
With thy shining raiment on!

Happy thou, whose race is ended,
With a crown so quickly won!

'We will lead thee by a river
Where the flowers are blooming fair;
We will sing to thee for ever,
For no night may darken there.
Thou shalt walk in robes of glory;
Thou shalt wear a golden crown;
Thou shalt sing redemption's story
With the saints around the throne!'

XI.

DEGREES OF GLORY IN HEAVEN.

'One star differeth from another star in glory.'—1 COR. XV. 41.

HOW gorgeous is the scene which meets our view, when, on a dark but cloudless night, our eye sweeps across the horizon, and surveys the myriads of sparkling orbs that bestud the firmament! As the poet has beautifully expressed it—

'The floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patterns of bright gold.'

And when we reflect that all the stars and planets that we see shining in the far-off regions of space are worlds, in many cases larger than our own earth, what exalted ideas the contemplation awakens of the Creator's power and glory!

All the celestial orbs, however, do not shine with the same brilliancy and lustre. While some sparkle with brightness, and seem like lamps hung out in space to relieve the gloom of midnight, others emit a light so dim as scarcely to be discernible from our planet. Similar variety characterizes all the works of Jehovah. It is found pervading all the operations of nature on our earth. The tiny flower is seen growing alongside the majestic oak; the small stream is seen emptying its waters into the expanded river; the lofty mountain is seen towering above the level plain. While the animal kingdom is divided into many different species, an infinite variety is frequently found in the same species. Mankind, though everywhere exhibiting features

which distinguish them from the brutes that perish, differ widely among themselves not only in their physical organization, but also in the mental faculties with which they have been endowed. While the intellectual capacity of some is so limited that they can with difficulty comprehend the simplest facts of science, others possess powers so vigorous, that, like Newton, they can analyze and classify the phenomena of nature, and make discoveries which form a vantage-ground to those who come after them. The variety that appears in the brightness of the orbs that bespangle the firmament is thus the development of a law which pervades the wide domain of creation.

While such variety is exhibited in the garniture of the material heavens, a like difference appears in the positions of bliss assigned to the redeemed in the heaven of heavens. As in the visible firmament, so in the mansions of bliss, one star differeth from another star in glory. While all the ransomed shine, some emit a brighter effulgence and reflect more of the divine glory than others. The happiness of all is complete; all experience a perfect deliverance from sin and its consequent misery; but some will gain a brighter reward, and possess a higher degree of bliss than others. The tender child, whose lisping tongue had just learned to pronounce the Saviour's name and hymn His praise when death terminated his connection with earth and time, will be an occupant of the celestial world; but his position of bliss will be less exalted than that of the experienced saint, who has borne the burden and heat of the day, and glorified Christ by a long life of devotedness and zeal. The penitent thief, who only sought and found mercy when the last sands of his mortal existence were running out, obtained an entrance into Paradise, where he now shines as an illustrious trophy of the Redeemer's grace; but his starless crown will present a striking contrast to the sparkling diadem worn by the Apostle Paul, who

was instrumental in bringing multitudes of souls under the power of the truth.

> 'Glorious is the state
> Even of the lowest there, but seats more nigh
> The Sovereign's throne His great servants wait.'

It is, however, the opinion of some theologians that there will be no such diversity in the positions of bliss assigned to the saints in the celestial world, but that all will possess an equal measure of glory. It has been argued that the existence of degrees in honour and felicity among the ranks of the redeemed would be opposed to the doctrine of salvation by grace. If, it has been said, eternal bliss has been purchased by the sacrifice of Christ, then those who are put in possession of that bliss will have no claim to any element of it on the ground of any merit of their own. But the objection arises from the confounding of two things that differ. While believers will gain admission to the heavenly world solely through faith in the mediation of Christ, the honours of that world will bear a proportion to the amount of piety and zeal which they possessed on earth. As an eminent writer* has remarked, 'God not only accepts of all who believe on His Son for His sake, but of their services also.' As their good deeds are the result not of their own worthiness, but the divine grace that was implanted in them, so the rewards of eternity will be conferred for actions which, through that grace, they were enabled to perform. 'Where is boasting, then? It is excluded.'

It has further been objected to this doctrine, that the elevation of some saints to a higher position of bliss than others would awaken, on the part of the less favoured, feelings of envy and jealousy. But this is founded on the supposition that believers will carry to the celestial world

* Angel James.

the depraved passions of earth and time; whereas these at the hour of death are all left behind, and love, pure and divine, shall be the controlling influence of their conduct. Even in this life the genuine follower of Christ rises above the workings of envy and malice, and in proportion as he rejoices in the welfare and prosperity of others does he add to his own happiness. In the celestial world, the saints will breathe only an atmosphere of love, and the sight of some of their brethren occupying a more exalted position than themselves will, instead of awakening a grudge, be an occasion of increase to their own bliss.

All objections, however, to the doctrine of degrees of glory in the celestial world are silenced by the clear teaching of the word of God on the subject. Our blessed Lord, to whom all the realities of the eternal world lay unveiled, unfolded on various occasions the animating truth, that in proportion to the fidelity and diligence which we exhibit in His service on earth, will be the position of bliss assigned to us in the eternal world. Can any one read the following passages without coming to the conclusion that the rewards of heaven, instead of presenting a dead level, will be graduated according to the measure of grace which each believer possessed during the period of his probation? 'Rejoice,' said Christ to His followers, with the view of inspiring them with comfort under the prospect of the persecutions that awaited them, 'and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' On another occasion He assured them that a cup of cold water, given from a principle of love, would be acknowledged and recompensed. And if a cup of cold water will be remembered on the great day of accounts, how much higher will be the reward of a life expended in effort to advance the divine glory! The same truth was taught by our Lord in the parable of the pounds. He who by trading increased his pound to ten pounds became ruler over ten cities, while he whose pound gained

five pounds was made ruler over five cities. With equal clearness and decision did the apostles declare the consolatory truth, that according to the standard of holiness which we attain on earth will be the positions of glory which we shall occupy hereafter. Paul, for example, represents this life as the spring-time of our being; so that according to the seed which we now sow will be the harvest that we reap in eternity. 'He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.' In another place, as we have already seen, the apostle compares the variety that will be found among the positions of bliss assigned to the redeemed to the diversity that appears in the brightness of the orbs that bespangle the firmament: 'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory.' Just as one of the celestial orbs is seen emitting a brighter effulgence than others, so, in the world of the redeemed, one saint will reflect more of the divine glory, and possess a higher measure of bliss than others. While the saint of weak faith will indeed gain admission to the heavenly kingdom, more abundant will be the entrance of those who have expended their time and talents in furthering the Redeemer's glory by adding immortal souls to the trophies of His grace. The multitudes converted from heathenism by such men as Judson, Williams, Moffat, and Duff, will be so many gems in their diadem.

Let the doctrine now unfolded stir me up to increased diligence in my preparation for celestial glory. Let a holy ambition inflame my breast to obtain through divine grace not only an entrance into heaven, but an exalted position of bliss. Let me ever be animated by the thought, that the closer the resemblance which I bear to the image of Christ, the nearer will I be to Him on His throne; that the more ardent my piety is on earth, the greater will be the measure

of bliss that shall be awarded to me hereafter; and that in proportion to the extent to which I am instrumental in bringing immortal souls to a saving knowledge of the truth will be the brightness of my crown. As I pursue my Christian course, let me keep the goal steadily in view, and be stimulated to unwearied zeal and activity by the prospect of the rewards which will be conferred at the end of the race.

'The stars of heaven, how few and wan
Are all we see below,
Compared with what remains unseen
Beyond all vision now!

'Who knows the untold brilliance there,
The wealth, the beauty hid?
Like sparkle of a lustrous eye
Beneath the eyelid hid.

'So with the heaven of better stars,
Of which there are but signs;
So with the stores of wisdom, hid
In everlasting mines.

'For what we shall in that day be
It doth not yet appear;
But when we see Him as He is,
We shall His likeness wear.'—BONAR.

XII.

HOPE UNDER BEREAVEMENT.

'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.'—1 THESS. IV. 14.

FAITH and hope are indissolubly joined in the experience of the believer. Faith is the pedestal on which hope erects her telescope to survey the glories of the celestial landscape. The stronger the faith that is possessed by the Christian, the brighter is his hope of heavenly felicity. Just as a man in ascending a mountain, the higher he climbs gains a more extended view of the surrounding country, so the saint, as he increases in faith, has a clearer and more unclouded prospect of coming bliss. In the words which form the theme of this evening's meditation, the apostle makes the faith of believers the foundation on which the superstructure of their hope is reared. Their faith in the resurrection of their Lord inspires them with the hope that their friends who have fallen asleep in Christ have not only become possessors of immortal bliss, but that, on the morning of the resurrection, their bodies, raised incorruptible, shall be re-united to their spirits, when they shall be caught up together with the Redeemer, and dwell for ever amid the glory of His presence. The resurrection of Christ is thus the pledge of His people's resurrection: 'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.'

The metaphor that is here employed to describe the condition of departed believers is beautiful and expressive: *they sleep in Jesus.* The figure was sometimes used, even

by heathen writers, to represent the termination of human life. The same idea is frequently exhibited by the inspired penmen. Of David it is said, that when he had served his generation according to the will of God, he fell asleep. Our Lord, when speaking to His disciples about the death of Lazarus, said, 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.' And of the proto-martyr Stephen, after his enemies had expended their rage upon him and destroyed his life, it was said that *he fell asleep*. His death was attended with circumstances of the keenest suffering; his body was mangled with wounds and covered with gore; but his soul's departure from the body is represented as falling asleep.

How beautifully does this metaphor represent the decease of the Christian! In sleep the son of toil forgets his fatigue, and the victim of suffering is oblivious of the distress to which he has long been subject. So, when death overtakes the believer, he is freed from the pain which disease or persecution has inflicted upon him. Sleep only continues for a stated period; the individual awakes from it with a body refreshed and invigorated, and possessed of new life and energy for the performance of duty. So the body of the believer is only to lie in the grave for a time; his very dust is precious in the Redeemer's sight, and on the morning of the resurrection it shall be renewed, fashioned like to Christ's glorious body, and again become the tenement of the immortal spirit.

The condition of departed believers, as suggested by the metaphor employed by the apostle, is a striking contrast to their state in the present life. Once they were tossed on the stormy ocean of time; the billows of affliction in quick succession rolled over them; and at times neither sun, moon, nor stars appeared in their horizon. But they have reached the port, and entered the haven of eternal safety. On earth, as they pursued their earthly pilgrimage, they had at one time to climb the rugged steep, and at another

descend the thorny valley. But they have terminated their journey, and taken their seat in their Father's house of many mansions. Here below, they were on the field of conflict, and had to exercise unceasing diligence lest their enemies should gain an advantage over them. But their weapons are laid aside, their victory is won, and they are adorned with the conqueror's crown—

> 'They sleep in Jesus, and are blest;
> How sweet their slumbers are!'

The dead in Christ, the apostle assures us, *God will bring with Him.* The reference is to the second coming of Christ, as is evident from the 16th verse of the chapter: 'For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.' The Redeemer shall then appear with a display of power and glory which shall strikingly contrast with the humiliation and suffering that characterized the period of His earthly sojourn. He shall come as the Lord and Governor of the universe. He shall come attended by the myriads of angelic beings who minister before the eternal throne. He shall come to effect an everlasting separation betwixt His friends and His foes, betwixt those who accepted and those who despised His invitations of mercy. Amid the issues of that momentous day, not one of His ransomed people will be overlooked or forgotten. Their names may have found no place amid the records of earthly history, but, as His jewels, they shall then shine with sparkling lustre, and be acknowledged as His in presence of an assembled universe.

The prediction, 'Them who sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him,' refers, in the first place, to their resurrection. Every grave shall then give up its dead; and while the wicked shall rise to shame and confusion, the righteous shall rise with bodies fashioned like to the glorified humanity of

Christ Himself. The body which believers possess on earth is subject to frailty and disease, and often acts as a clog to the exercise of their mental faculties; but on the morning of the resurrection, that body shall undergo a glorious transformation, and, endowed with celestial vigour, shall become a fit tenement for the immortal spirit. The bodies of believers, raised incorruptible, shall, when reunited to their spirits, be conducted to the abodes of bliss which infinite love has provided for them. The general assembly and Church of the first-born shall then be complete. The happiness of the redeemed, drawn from the great fountain of joy, shall be perfect, and no cloud of sorrow shall darken the horizon that stretches over their immortal career.

With such blissful hopes animating the breasts of the redeemed, why should they mourn in bitterness when friends, who are united to the Redeemer by faith, take their departure from the scenes of earth? 'They are not lost, but gone before.' Their bodies, though laid in the dust, will only remain there till the morning of the resurrection, when they shall assume a glorified form, and bear a resemblance to the human body of their exalted Lord. Their souls are already with Christ—they dwell in His presence—they see His glory—they are partakers of the bliss of angels and ransomed men, who, like themselves, have gained an entrance into the heavenly kingdom. Were they permitted to revisit our earth, as did Moses and Elijah when they appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, can we for a moment suppose that they would desire to make this sublunary scene again the place of their abode? Would not such sentiments as the following be the burden of their address to us?—'Weep not for us, for we are now possessors of a bliss to which on earth our hearts were strangers. In the celestial world which we now inhabit, pain, sickness, and sorrow are unknown, and happiness, pure in its nature, and destined to be eternal in its duration, is our portion.

Here death never enters, the funeral procession is never seen, and immortality is the law of our being. On earth we saw the Redeemer's glory through a glass darkly; now we behold Him face to face, and, amid the joys of His immediate presence, we now wonder how the things of earth could possess such a hold on our affections. Dry, then, your tears as you think of our departure from you, and prepare diligently for the period when death shall sever your connection with time, and open the door for your admission to the world of bliss, where we now dwell.'

Have I friends who have fallen asleep in Christ, and who I believe are now with Him in glory? Then let me not sorrow as those who have no hope. Their departure I indeed mourn, for it has created a blank in my relationships which I cannot expect to see filled up in time. My heart is filled with sadness as I miss the sweet accents of their voice, the smile of their countenance, and their genial society. But let me be consoled by the reflection that my loss is their gain. Their ransomed spirits are before the eternal throne, and they are now in a position to contrast the eternal weight of glory with the afflictions of their earthly lot. The glories of the Redeemer, which they only saw dimly with the eye of faith while they were strangers and pilgrims here below, they now behold with unveiled face. The mysteries of Providence, which often perplexed them amid the imperfections of time, are now unfolded to their gaze amid the cloudless light of eternity. Friends in Christ, whose departure they themselves mourned, they have now met, and, in fellowship with them and other ransomed spirits, they experience a happiness with which the society of the world cannot compare. Their bodies, indeed, mingle with the dust, and have become the prey of corruption; but a day is coming when these bodies shall not only again awake to life, but, in the resemblance which they shall bear to the glorified humanity of Christ, attest

their relationship to Him. Let me, then, imitate their faith, that at the hour of death I may be admitted to a companionship with their bliss.

'Say, why should friendship grieve for those
Who safe arrive on Canaan's shore?
Released from all their hurtful foes,
They are not lost, but gone before.

'Secure from every mortal care,
By sin and sorrow vexed no more,
Eternal happiness they share
Who are not lost, but gone before.

'To Jordan's banks whene'er we come,
And hear the swelling waters roar,
Jesus! convey us safely home
To friends not lost, but gone before.'

XIII.

THE SOCIETY OF HEAVEN—ANGELS.

'An innumerable company of angels.'—HEB. XII. 22.

MAN is a social being; and, whether viewed in relation to his position in this life or the life to come, much of his happiness must be drawn from the society in which he mingles. The deliverance of the Almighty respecting the first representative of the human family,—'It is not good that the man should be alone,'—may, in an unrestricted sense, be affirmed of all his posterity. Friendship, which was beautifully described by an ancient philosopher as the union of two souls in one, the Christian religion does not condemn, but rather imprints its sacred seal upon it, and renders it a source of refined delight. The society of earth, however,—a reflection though in many instances it is of the fellowship that subsisted between our first parents when they walked in spotless innocence in Eden,—is but an imperfect medium of happiness. Sin, which has marred our other enjoyments, has cast its blighting influence on this, and, alas! frequently rendered it an occasion of sorrow and disappointment. Sometimes the friend whom we loved, and whose character we admired, has, on further acquaintance, proved himself unworthy of our confidence. Misunderstandings and suspicions, arising from circumstances of the most trivial kind, have often separated those who were united in the bonds of the closest intimacy. Relatives near and dear are sometimes scattered far and wide; the mighty ocean rolls between them; and only at distant intervals can they hear

respecting each other's welfare. And even when the blessings of earthly friendship are enjoyed without the alloy of suspicion or disappointment, a time must come when death shall sunder the closest and most intimate connections.

No such imperfection characterizes the friendships of the celestial world, which are pure in their nature and eternal in their duration. The truth of this proposition will appear when we consider the nature of the society among whom the redeemed in heaven shall mingle. 'An innumerable company of angels' shall be the companions of their bliss. To the word of God we are indebted for all the information we possess regarding this order of beings. The views which are there given of them are such as to impress us with the loftiest ideas of their dignity and capacities. The term *angels* is applied to them as they are the immediate messengers of Jehovah in fulfilling His high behests throughout His boundless empire. They are named *cherubim* and *seraphim*, to mark them out as beings entirely devoted to the service of the Creator, and inflamed with the most ardent love to His character. They are described as *thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers*, to indicate the various grades of honour with which they are invested. As to the number of angels, it is represented as *innumerable*, and as *ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands.*

As angels are to form the companions of the redeemed through eternal ages, it is a matter of the highest interest and importance that we make ourselves acquainted with the accounts which Scripture gives of their nature and employments. If the emigrant about to embark for some foreign land studies the manners and customs of the people among whom he expects to mingle, it becomes pilgrims to the celestial world to seek with greater eagerness to know the character of angelic beings, with whom they are for ever to associate.

Guided by the light reflected on the subject of *angels* from the word of God, we find that *holiness* is the most prominent feature of their character. They were perfectly holy when they came from the hand of their Creator, and ever since they have been increasing in their resemblance to the divine image. Once, like men, they were in a state of probation; whatever was the temptation to disobedience presented before them, they yielded not to it; and for thousands of years their conduct has perfectly harmonized with the divine will and requirements. Their minds are thus strangers to sin, which has alienated the affections of the human family from God, and reduced them to such ruin and misery. As the result of the perfect holiness which distinguishes angels, their happiness is complete. No cloud of sorrow, which so often oppresses the hearts of men, darkens their horizon. With no consciousness of sin to bar their approach to the throne of Jehovah, their fellowship with Him is close and intimate; and, basking in the glory of His immediate presence, what joy must fill their minds!

As a necessary consequence of the holiness which distinguishes the character of angels, they are benevolent beings. Holiness and love are kindred qualities, and must always dwell together in a mind that reflects the spotless purity of the divine nature. Surrounding the throne of Jehovah, angels breathe only an atmosphere of love, where, next to the advancement of the divine glory, an increase of happiness to the intelligent universe is the supreme object of their desire. Many illustrations of the benevolent character of angels are found in the word of God. Thus, when the material universe was called into existence, angels shouted for joy as they thought of the many intelligent beings who should reflect the image of the Creator, and be the objects of His love. When mankind fell from their allegiance to the divine authority, and God, in the exercise of mercy, devised a plan for their restoration to His favour, angels were

diligent students of that plan through all its developments, till it was finally accomplished by the death and sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When salvation is embraced by a single sinner—when the tear of penitence is seen falling from his eye—when, from being an heir of wrath, he becomes an heir of glory, the tidings are instantly conveyed from earth to heaven, and a flood of joy is diffused among all the ranks of angelic beings. Standing on the summit of created bliss, angels can form a correct estimate of the important consequences that flow from the conversion of even one member of the human family. When, from their exalted position, they view all the misery from which such a sinner is rescued; when they contemplate all the happiness to which he is destined; when they reflect that, though the material universe with all its furniture of worlds shall be dissolved, he shall, with glorified powers, enjoy increasing felicity with themselves as the cycles of eternity roll on, they regard his position with emotions of profound interest and ecstatic joy. What an insight does the declaration of Christ, 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth,' give of the benevolent character of these holy beings! Envy, jealousy, and malice, feelings which rankle in the human breast, and so frequently mar the fellowship that ought to subsist betwixt man and man, find no place in their exalted minds.

Angels are possessed of a very high degree of intelligence. Not only were they originally endowed with intellectual faculties which far exceed those of man, but they have ever occupied a position the most favourable for the acquisition of vast stores of knowledge. The place of their abode is the immediate presence of Jehovah, and no barrier of sin intercepts their communication with the great fountain of wisdom. In intimate fellowship with the great *I AM*, how clear and unclouded must be their views of His character and perfections! How comprehensive must be their know-

ledge of the works of creation! From various allusions in Scripture, it is evident that they can move from one place to another with marvellous rapidity. Thus, for example, we are informed that on one occasion, when Daniel had begun to pray, the command was given to Gabriel to fly swiftly, that he might convey a message to the prophet; and before he had finished his supplications, the angel was by his side. From this circumstance it is evident that the speed with which angels travel furnishes them with marvellous capabilities for acquiring knowledge. Regions, whose faintest outline the earthly astronomer with the most powerful telescope cannot discern, will be intimately known to them. Often do they visit our world with errands of love; and as they are the immediate messengers of Jehovah, we cannot doubt that they often convey commissions to other provinces of His vast dominions. The attainments of these exalted intelligences, as compared with those of the most intellectual of men, must be inconceivably great.

Such, then, will be the companions of the redeemed through the ages of eternity. Angels, distinguished for holiness, benevolence, and wisdom, will be the associates of their bliss. What sources of happiness will fellowship with such exalted beings open up in the celestial world! Envy and jealousy, malice and revenge, feelings which so often sow discord among earthly friends, will find no place in their holy society. The contemplation of an increase of happiness among the redeemed will, instead of awakening a grudge in their pure minds, only tend to augment their own bliss. Then what opportunities will fellowship with these holy beings open up to glorified believers for gaining stores of knowledge and wisdom! What an amount of information they will be able to convey respecting the divine character and perfections, the dispensations of Providence, and the results of the plan of human redemption!

If I am indeed an heir of glory, angels will be my com-

panions throughout a blessed eternity. Then let me study their character, and seek a growing resemblance to it. As they reflect the spotless purity of the divine nature, so let it be my earnest endeavour to be holy as God is holy. As they, notwithstanding their lofty endowments, are distinguished for humility, so let me strive to eradicate pride from my nature, and cultivate meekness in all my deportment. Let it be my earnest prayer, that in all the aspects in which they are exhibited in the word of God I may become like them, that thus I may be qualified for their exalted society. Let the prospect of enjoying their holy converse tend to wean my affections from the things of earth and time. Friendship here below is valuable, and a source of refined delight, but not to be named in comparison with the companionship of angels. Fellowship with them will as far transcend the joys of earth as the light of the sun, when he shines in mid-day splendour, exceeds the flickering light of a taper.

'Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne;
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one.

'"Worthy the Lamb that died," they cry,
"To be exalted thus;"
"Worthy the Lamb," our lips reply,
"For He was slain for us."'

XIV.

THE SOCIETY OF HEAVEN—GLORIFIED SAINTS.

'The spirits of just men made perfect.'—HEB. XII. 23.

AMONG the inhabitants of the celestial world to whose society the believer at the hour of death is admitted, are glorified saints, who, like himself, had once to encounter the difficulties and temptations of earth. In some important respects, the tie which unites him to these ransomed ones is closer and more endearing than that which links him to the innumerable company of angels. He possesses with the redeemed a common nature; like them, he knows by experience the evil effects of sin and the joy of deliverance from it; like them, he has passed from death to life, and has undergone a regenerating change by the influences of the Holy Spirit. Next to the feeling of rapture which fills his soul when first he contemplates the Redeemer, His countenance radiant with love, will, we may suppose, be his joy as he looks around and beholds the great company who fought the good fight of faith, and have gained the prize of everlasting life.

Among the multitude of the redeemed, to whose society, if we die possessed of an interest in Christ, we shall be admitted, we may suppose that they to whom we were related, or with whom we were fellow-sojourners on earth, will be the first to welcome us to the abodes of bliss. It is strange that the theory should ever have been entertained, that saints who knew each other in this world will not recognise each other in the next. Can it for a moment be

supposed that in heaven all the memories of earth will be obliterated, and that those who took sweet counsel together here below will not renew their friendship when all the faculties of their nature shall be refined and glorified? If the emigrant who has gone to a distant land retains, amid new and varied scenes, a fresh recollection of home and childhood, shall not believers who have passed from time into eternity not talk together of their earthly experiences, which were the discipline appointed by infinite wisdom to fit them for the exalted positions that they now occupy? The tidings of a believer's death, while they may only awaken sorrow among relatives in this world, will be an occasion of rapturous joy to relatives who have gone before to their eternal home, as they shall then be reunited to one, fellowship with whom will be a new element in their bliss. As the news spreads among the ranks of the redeemed that another trophy of the Redeemer's love is about to be admitted to their society, may we not believe that they who knew him on earth, and were associated with him in his trials and temptations, will hasten to meet him at his entrance, and welcome him to his everlasting abode?

When death-divided friends meet in their Father's house, how close will be the tie that unites them, and with what eager interest will they talk together on those themes that pertained to their earthly experience! What sentiments of gratitude will fill their minds as they recount the trials and sorrows which entered their lot during the period of their probation, but which they shall then see were blessings in disguise,—means employed by unerring wisdom to draw their affections from the things of time, and lead them to centre them on unfading and eternal joys! With what feelings of thrilling delight will the Christian minister, whose office it was to present to his fellow-men the offer of redemption through Christ, discourse with those whom he was instrumental in bringing to a knowledge of the truth

on themes that on earth were but imperfectly understood, but which shall then be contemplated in the cloudless light of the divine presence! How dear will be the fellowship subsisting between saints who often sat together at the communion-table in the Church below, and over the memorials of a Redeemer's death testified their attachment to Him, as they see that Redeemer face to face, seated on a throne of majesty—not now the Man of Sorrows, but the object of universal homage! How rapturous will be the joy that pervades the members of the family circle, then reunited, as they reflect that death shall never again thin their ranks, nor the pang of bereavement ever again be experienced!

The society of the redeemed in heaven, however, will not only comprise those who were related to us, or with whom we were acquainted on earth, but saints of every age and clime. From the righteous Abel, who was the first to ascend the ladder of faith to the mansions of bliss, a multitude which no man can number will be united in the bonds of sweetest fellowship. There we shall see Adam and Eve, the parents of our race, as we may fondly entertain the hope that they repented of the sin which brought death into the world and all our woe, and sought redemption through the Saviour whose coming had been graciously made known to them. With what eagerness will we listen, from their own lips, to the story of their fall, and the grace that abounded towards them when they gained a higher position of bliss than they forfeited by their guilt! There we shall see Noah, and hear him tell of the marvellous deliverance which he and those dear to him obtained from the Deluge, which consigned a world of transgressors to destruction. There we shall see Abraham, holding a distinguished place among the ranks of the redeemed as a reward for the illustrious pattern of faith which he left to the Church Militant in every age. There we shall see Moses, who, though not permitted to tread the earthly Canaan, obtained an abundant entrance

into the heavenly, and who will still delight to recount the stirring scenes of patriarchal history, which with his pen he so graphically described. There we shall see David, still, as of old, hymning the praises of his Lord, but in louder and holier strains than he ever did on Bethlehem's hills or in Judah's palace. There we shall see Isaiah, not now gazing on the glory of Jehovah through the obscure medium of types and symbols, but standing in His immediate presence—not now looking on Christ as a lamb led to the slaughter, but seeing of the travail of His soul, and satisfied. There we shall meet with the apostles, and hear them recount the story, which will be ever fresh and ever new, of the thrilling incidents that transpired in the earthly life of their Master, from His birth at Bethlehem to the hour that He stood on the Mount of Olives and ascended to the right hand of His Father, there to reign till all His enemies should be subdued. There we shall see Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, still leading the multitudes who were converted, either by his ministry or writings, to a deeper insight into the great mysteries of redemption; ever delighting to tell of the time when, on the road to Damascus, he became a trophy of divine grace; and still pointing back to the cross as the foundation of the eternal life which is now in his possession. There we shall meet with martyrs, who bled and died for the cause of Christ; authors, whose writings we studied, and by which we gained an enlarged acquaintance with the system of divine truth; men, illustrious for science, who, amid the stores of knowledge which they amassed, perceived the superior excellence of the knowledge of Christ; missionaries who were instrumental in bringing multitudes of the heathen to an acquaintance with salvation; saints from every land, who, whatever may have been the diversities of their earthly history and experience, all possess ardent love to Christ and reflect His spotless image.

High will be the honour of being admitted to such society as this. The honour is in store for every genuine believer in Christ. The meanest saint on earth will, through eternity, associate with the wise and illustrious of every age and clime. Through all the ranks of that glorified throng, envy, selfishness, jealousy, malice, and every unholy feeling, will for ever be unknown; while love, pure and uninterrupted, will link soul to soul in bonds of the closest fellowship.

With the prospect of becoming a member of the general assemby and Church of the first-born, let me cultivate those sentiments of love and benevolence which prevail in the celestial world. Let envy and ill-will find no place in my heart; and let me seek to embrace in my affections the whole family of man, but especially those who are of the household of faith, and who are to be my companions through eternal ages. If I am to dwell for ever in the Church Triumphant with those who are fellow-members with me in the Church Militant, why should a shade of coldness or indifference characterize my deportment towards them? As in heaven the distinctions of sect and party are unknown, so let me love and respect all the followers of Christ, to whatever branch of the Christian Church they may belong.

Let the prospect of being admitted to the society of the redeemed in glory raise my affections above the things of earth and time, and place them on things unseen and eternal. Fellowship with Christian friends on earth may be a source of refined delight; but what will be the joy of communion with Abraham, Moses, and David; Isaiah and all the prophets; Peter, John, Paul, and the rest of the apostles, martyrs, and reformers, believers of every age and clime,—all dwelling together in harmony and love, and realizing an increase of bliss as they see the divine glory advanced by the diffusion of happiness among their shining ranks!

'At home with Jesus! He who went before,
For His own people mansions to prepare;
The soul's deep longings stilled, it's conflicts o'er,
All rest and blessedness with Jesus there—
What home like this can the wide earth afford?
"So shall we be for ever with the Lord."

'With Him all gathered! to that blessed home,
Through all its windings, still the pathway tends;
While ever and anon bright glimpses come
Of that fair city where the journey ends,
Where all of bliss is centred in one word,
"So shall we be for ever with the Lord."

'Here kindred hearts are severed far and wide
By many a weary mile of land and sea,
Or life's all-varied cares and paths divide;
But yet a joyful gathering shall be,
The broken links repaired, the lost restored—
"So shall we be for ever with the Lord."'

XV.

HEAVEN A HOME.

'In my Father's house.'—JOHN XIV. 1.

AS we read the discourses which our Lord delivered to His disciples in the immediate prospect of His death and crucifixion, how deep is the insight which we obtain into the love which He bore to His people! We are, as it were, permitted to look into His heart, and see the workings of His affections. The hour fixed upon in the counsels of eternity for His being offered a sacrifice for sin was drawing near; shadows reflected from Golgotha were already overcasting His spirit. Before many hours had elapsed, He was to fall a prey to the malice of His enemies, be arraigned as a criminal at the bar of the high priest, exposed to the scorn and ribaldry of heathen soldiers, and then suspended in agony on the cross, that He might bear the burden of man's guilt. And yet, with the near prospect of His sufferings in view, His concern was not for Himself, but the little band of followers whom He should leave behind Him, exposed to the contempt and persecution of a heartless world. With His omniscient eye He foresaw all the troubles that should assail them as the heralds of His gospel; and, as a true and faithful Friend, He opened up to them sources of consolation which were fitted to cheer and sustain them when they should be deprived of His company and fellowship. He assured them that while persecution might assail them in this world, a home should be provided for them in heaven,

into which He Himself should welcome them: 'In my Father's house are many mansions.' Like strains of sweetest music, gladdening the heart that has been wrung with sorrow, must these words have fallen on the ears of the apostles, after the startling intimation which He had just given them of His approaching sufferings.

These words, while they must have inspired the hearts of the disciples with hope and courage, are equally fitted to cheer and animate the people of God in every age. They were addressed primarily, indeed, to the first followers of the Redeemer, when they were met in circumstances of peculiar interest, but they were intended to strengthen the faith of the Church Militant down to the end of time. In the dark night of sorrow and affliction, amid the trials and vicissitudes of earth, when friends and relatives are removed from our side, we may hear with the ear of faith the tender voice of Jesus uttering the assurance: 'In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.'

Amid the many precious truths which this brief sentiment of our Lord suggests, one that stands out with prominence is the home character which it gives to the celestial abode of the righteous. *Heaven is our Father's house.* There are many mansions in it, but it constitutes but one house. Home! how dear is the name, and how tender are the associations that cluster around it! It is the centre whence radiates most of the happiness that is enjoyed on earth. It is the scene on which memory loves to linger, amid the vicissitudes that attend life's chequered pilgrimage. It is the spot to which the imagination of the emigrant fondly turns, amid the diversified objects that arrest his attention in the land of his adoption.

Heaven will be a home; but, while conserving all that is valuable in our ideas of an earthly home, will have none of its imperfection. Home on earth and home in heaven

present so many points of difference, that contrast rather than comparison must be instituted between them. However dear may be the attractions of an earthly home, sin has entered it and marred its enjoyments. How often are strife and discord found at work in a household, calling into play the worst passions of human nature, and leading members of the same family to exhibit towards each other feelings the very opposite of those which they ought to cherish! But in the celestial home, love and harmony pervade all the ranks of the redeemed, while envy, jealousy, and revenge find no place in their regenerated natures.

The trials that oftentimes enter the earthly home by sickness or bereavement will be altogether unknown in the heavenly home. How frequently does affliction enter a household, and cause not only keen suffering to the invalid himself, but pain and grief to the hearts of anxious relatives! And then, when death has done its work—when the mourners go about the streets—when the lifeless corpse is laid in the narrow house—what desolation fills the home once the scene of mirth and gladness! But in the celestial home sickness and disease never appear; sorrow never oppresses the soul; the funeral tramp is never heard, for death is there unknown; and happiness, pure and unalloyed, flows in a perpetual stream from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

The perpetuity of the celestial home is what stamps it with its highest value, and presents it as a striking contrast to any earthly home. The home on earth, however great may be the happiness enjoyed in it, or tender the associations that cluster around it, must sooner or later be broken up. The members of the family remove to different parts of the world, and never again meet under the parental roof. Perhaps the old homestead crumbles into ruins, or it finds new occupants, where

'Faces, and footsteps, and all things strange,'

remind the passer-by of the change that has taken place. How often has the exile from his native land, who has for years been wandering in foreign countries, felt the cold chill stealing over his heart on his return, as he drew near to the site of the old home! The mountain, the stream, and the forest are the same as when he left; but when he enters the old familiar dwelling, the tear trickles down his cheek as he finds father, mother, brothers, and sisters gone, and their places occupied by others.

Contrasted with the perishable nature of earthly habitations, what a value does the permanence of the celestial home stamp upon its character! Our Father's house is, like Himself, eternal, and neither ruin nor decay will ever appear among its mansions. Its foundation is the Rock of Ages; its minarets will ever sparkle with divine radiance; its enjoyments will never be interrupted. Millenniums shall pass away, but its happiness, instead of showing any signs of diminution, will be found to be ever on the increase. Its palms shall be ever verdant; its crowns shall be ever bright; its harps shall be ever in tune. For aught we know, its occupants may occasionally go forth to explore the wonders of the Almighty in the remotest parts of creation; but they shall miss no familiar face on their return; they shall shed no tear over some friend who was lost in their absence; they shall find no change in the celestial mansions, except it be a change to a higher measure of bliss.

Let the prospect of enjoying the bliss of the celestial home raise my affections above the things of time. Whatever may be the attractions of an earthly home, they are not for a moment to be named in comparison with the joys of the house eternal in the heavens. Here below, happiness is alloyed with sorrow, friendship is followed by bereavement, hope is quenched in disappointment. But the bliss of the celestial home will never be interrupted or

diminished; death-divided friends shall meet, but never again to part; and my Heavenly Father shall ever open up new sources of enjoyment to His ransomed children. Let me, then, look forward with rapture to the hour that shall see my soul wing its flight to its appointed mansion in the realms of bliss. Let me welcome each returning day and each revolving year, as bringing me nearer to fellowship with the General Assembly and Church of the First-born.

'"For ever with the Lord!"
Amen, so let it be;
Life from the dead is in that word—
'Tis immortality.

'Here in the body pent,
Absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home.

'My Father's house on high,
Home of my soul, how near
At times, to faith's far-seeing eye,
Thy golden gates appear!

'Ah! then my spirit faints
To reach the land I love,
The bright inheritance of saints,
Jerusalem above.'

XVI.

MANY MANSIONS IN THE CELESTIAL HOME.

'In my Father's house are many mansions.'—JOHN XIV. 2.

THIS statement of our Lord stands alone amid the descriptions which the inspired volume gives of the celestial home of the believer. In no other part of the word of God are we taught the same truth, that the future abode of the righteous comprises many mansions. Its correct meaning cannot, therefore, be educed by comparing it with any parallel passage. It is one of those revelations of future glory respecting which we earnestly desire clearer light, but for which we must wait till faith shall give place to sight, and hope shall be realized in the fulness of bliss. Without seeking, however, to be wise above what is written, we may, as we meditate on this passage, contemplate some of the truths which it teaches.

One truth clearly suggested by this sentiment of our Lord is, that heaven will be the eternal residence of a large number of the human family. Many mansions are being prepared for their reception, thus intimating that not merely a few members of our race, but multitudes, shall be participants of everlasting bliss. Such a view accords with the representations which Scripture uniformly gives of the number of the redeemed. Christ in another place assures us that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Isaiah, who saw in symbol the glory as well as the sufferings of the Messiah, assures us that 'He shall

see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied'—that is, by multitudes of souls redeemed by His blood, and made possessors of immortal felicity. We are told that the Saviour shall lead many sons to glory. John, in Revelation, speaks of the redeemed of his time as a company which no man can number; and during the ages that have since elapsed, what accessions must have been made to the blissful throng! In the triumphs that are yet to be achieved by the gospel, millions upon millions of our race shall be rescued from the guilt of sin, made monuments of saving mercy, and admitted to the General Assembly and Church of the First-born. From the sure word of prophecy we know that this world, which has long been a rebel province in the empire of Jehovah, shall be regenerated, and be a nursery from which souls shall be transplanted to the celestial Paradise, there to bloom for ever in the sunshine of the divine presence.

It is thus evident that the number of the redeemed who shall people the celestial world will be inconceivably large. Myriads upon myriads of redeemed ones shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. To accommodate the vast assemblage, many mansions are being prepared. Great though the company of the glorified saints shall be, there will be abundance of room for all. There will be room for patriarchs, prophets, and all the righteous of Old Testament times—room for apostles and the multitudes whom they were instrumental in bringing under the power of the truth—room for the thousands of martyrs who shed their blood for the cause of Christ—room for Christians of every clime, who, whatever might be the peculiarities that distinguished them on earth, shall all be associated as one family of love in their Father's house.

The many mansions spoken of by our Lord further suggest the idea of diversity in the positions of glory assigned to the redeemed in the celestial world. While all

will be happy, some will possess a higher measure of bliss than others. That there will be different degrees of glory among the ransomed in heaven is what we have reason to expect, not only from this passage, but other representations of the word of God. Thus the Apostle Paul says: 'One star differeth from another star in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead.' Our blessed Lord, who shall Himself confer the honours of heaven, and to whose omniscient eye all the scenes of eternity lay unveiled, uttered the declaration, as an incentive to hospitality: 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.' That the honours of heaven will bear a proportion to the zeal exhibited in advancing the divine glory on earth is evident from the language of Daniel: 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.'

From all these representations it is evident that uniformity will not characterize the positions of bliss in the celestial world, but that degrees of glory will be meted out to the redeemed, according to the standard of holiness which they reached on earth. The man of strong faith, who often took his station beneath the shadow of the cross as he rested his hopes on the sacrifice that was there offered, will have his mansion near the eternal throne. The man whose love to the Redeemer was so ardent that he was willing to make any sacrifice for His sake will then be admitted to closest fellowship with Him. The man who laboured assiduously to extend the knowledge of the truth, and who was the instrument of bringing multitudes of souls under its power, shall shine as a star of the first magnitude in the celestial firmament. The man who for many years was stretched on a bed of affliction, and

racked day and night with pain, but who, instead of murmuring and repining, exhibited patience and resignation to the divine will, shall have a special mansion assigned to him, where, as he recalls the incidents of his earthly experience, he shall find that the darkest dispensations of Providence towards him were working together for his good.

Another idea suggested by the many mansions spoken of by our Lord is the intimate fellowship which the saints shall have one with the other. While some mansions will be assigned to the redeemed in token of the honour conferred upon them, may we not suppose that many of these mansions will be blissful retreats, where friends shall meet friends, and, in the interchange of fellowship, experience a happiness with which the highest society of earth cannot compare? That saints who were acquainted on earth will recognise each other in heaven, and derive from intercourse with them much of the happiness they enjoy, is a proposition whose truth will scarcely be called in question by those who are familiar with the representations which Scripture gives of the future state. Are we not told that we shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven? And if we shall know these patriarchs, who lived in the world thousands of years before us, shall we not know individuals with whom on earth we often took sweet counsel together? While all the General Assembly and Church of the First-born will be one great family, knit together in the bonds of love, there will be inner circles of fellowship; and we can imagine little companies of friends, after joining with the millions of their brethren in ascribing songs of praise to the Redeemer, retiring to their own mansion, where, in converse with each other, they shall obtain a deeper insight into the great mysteries of redemption. In one mansion may be heard Moses, explaining to a crowd of ransomed Israelites how

his law had been a schoolmaster to lead sinners to Christ. In another mansion, David may be surrounded by a multitude who were gladdened by his psalms during their earthly pilgrimage, and who shall join with him in singing the new song to the praise of redeeming love. In another mansion may be found Paul, opening up to his converts from Philippi, Ephesus, and Corinth, fresh glories in the Saviour's character. In another mansion may be seen John, unfolding to a crowd of eager inquirers the meaning of those symbols which he beheld in Patmos while an exile for the testimony of Jesus Christ. In another mansion may be heard martyrs, raising songs of loudest gratitude for the grace that enabled them to lay down their lives in proof of their attachment to Christ and His cause. In another mansion may assemble men of science, still pursuing the studies which engrossed their attention on earth, but with minds vastly more capable of tracing the glory of Jehovah in the wide domain of His works. While the redeemed may thus, in separate mansions, find in fellowship with kindred spirits a chief element of their bliss, we can suppose all gathering together as one vast congregation, at stated intervals, to celebrate the praise of the Creator, and join in singing the song, which, though often sung, will be ever new: 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory for ever and ever!'

Let the prospect of occupying a mansion in the celestial home tend to lessen my attachment to the concerns of earth and time. How substantial will be the enjoyments of my future abode, as compared with the highest happiness of this transitory state! How exalted will be the society of heaven, as contrasted with the purest companionships of earth! How close and intimate will be the ties of fellowship that shall unite the saints one to another in the

mansions of bliss that the Redeemer is now preparing for them! Let, then, my affections rise from earth and centre on my eternal abode. Let it be my fervent prayer, united with earnest effort, that I may advance in holiness and ripeness for the position of bliss that I am hereafter to occupy. Let me be animated to diligence in discharging the duties of the Christian life by the reflection, that the more unwearied my zeal is on earth, the brighter will be my crown in the celestial world—that the more I reflect the image of Christ now, the more abundant will be the honours conferred upon me hereafter—that the more I labour to advance the divine glory in the Church below, the more exalted will be my mansion in the house eternal in the heavens.

'The home of the ransom'd, the land of the blest,
Where pilgrims shall enter a glorious rest,
Shall wander in gladness the pastures of green,
And drink the still waters of pleasure serene;

'The home that our Saviour has gone to prepare—
No heart can conceive of the blessedness there,
Of raptures unending awaiting the just,
When pure in His likeness they rise from the dust.

'We bless Thee, dear Saviour, who call'st us to share
The beautiful home Thou hast gone to prepare;
We trust in Thy mercy, that, wash'd from our sin,
Through yonder bright gates we may all enter in.'

XVII.

CHRIST'S CANDOUR: A PLEDGE OF BLISS.

'If it were not so, I would have told you.'—JOHN XIV. 2.

THE reality of eternal bliss is one of those subjects regarding which the human mind is ever prone to exhibit unbelief. Man is slow to credit the doctrine that, in the future world, felicity such as the Bible reveals can be his unending portion. Even the genuine saint, however strong may be his assurance of an interest in the mediation of Christ, will occasionally hesitate as he attempts to accept, in all its length and breadth, the promise that, at the hour of death, he shall be the companion of seraphs, and enter on the possession of an exceeding weight of glory. His faith, at times, in the reality of celestial bliss is, it is to be feared, rather a dreamy assent to the truth than an enlightened principle which constrains him to set his affections on those things that are above. But great and unspeakable as is the happiness which the Bible reveals as reserved for the ransomed of our race, no shade of doubt should appear on the horizon of the Christian's hope regarding it. The doctrine of a future state is unfolded in no obscure or mystical terms. The word of God abounds with assurances, clear and unmistakeable, that when death terminates the connection of the believer with earth and time, he at once enters on the possession of bliss, pure in its nature, and which shall be as eternal as Jehovah Himself. He is told that, absent from the body, he shall be present with the Lord; that when the earthly house of

this tabernacle is dissolved, he has a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; that, on the very day of his death, he shall be with Christ in Paradise.

Among the assurances of future bliss with which the word of God abounds, there is, perhaps, none better fitted to strengthen faith and dispel doubt than the precious utterance of our Lord: 'If it were not so, I would have told you.' It was as if He had said: 'You, my followers, cherish the hope of future bliss. Your faith is founded on the revelation of the doctrine taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. I, whose abode from all eternity has been in the regions of unclouded bliss, know well the nature of that world which is to be your everlasting abode. Were your existence to terminate with death, and were there no felicity awaiting you beyond the grave, I should at once have quenched those hopes that now gladden your hearts, but which were destined never to be realized. I, whose omniscient eye descries all the scenes of that eternity which lies beyond the circle of earth and time, assure you that immortality is no dream, but that when death terminates your efforts to extend my cause, mansions of glory, which I go to prepare for you, shall be your everlasting abode.'

Jesus possessed qualifications which pre-eminently fitted Him for discoursing on the blissful realities of the celestial world. Not only had He from everlasting ages dwelt in that world, and could testify to what He Himself had seen of its happiness, but all the scenes of felicity amid which the redeemed shall mingle through the coming ages of eternity were mapped out before His omniscient eye. What a weight is thus to be attached to His utterances on this theme, as compared with the teachings of all who had gone before Him! On the subject of man's immortality heathen philosophers speculated, but were never able to

arrive at satisfactory conclusions. There might be guesses or hints among them as to the reality of a future state, and the character of the happiness which men should enjoy after death; but all their investigations resulted only in dreamy uncertainty. In Old Testament times the prophets were permitted to behold in symbol the blissful realities of the celestial world; but what they saw was only a glimpse, and that through the imperfect medium of sense. It was reserved for Christ and His gospel to bring life and immortality to light. He had Himself dwelt amid the fulness of that joy which He assured His followers should be their portion after death. His hand had created the heaven of heavens, and prepared the seats of bliss that were to be occupied by the redeemed from among men. He laid out its golden streets; He erected its pearly gates; He formed the fountain whence flows the river of life, to gladden the saints as they walk along its banks. The scenery of heaven, the character of its bliss, and the employments of its inhabitants, were themes regarding which He could say, 'I testify what I have seen.' The man who has lived long in a country, travelled through it, and mingled in its society, is better qualified to describe it than another who has only read or heard of it. So Jesus, whose abode from eternity had been in the heavenly world, was familiar with all its scenes and enjoyments, and therefore all His declarations respecting it are to be received as the oracles of eternal truth.

The candour of Christ, viewed in connection with the intimate knowledge which He possessed of the heavenly world, is a foundation, firm and sure, on which the believer rests his hopes of celestial bliss: 'If it were not so, I would have told you.' As one of the persons of the Godhead, truth is an essential attribute of His character. Every pledge He has given He will redeem; every promise He has uttered He will fulfil. The material heavens, with all

their furniture of worlds, may pass away; the earth, with all its wealth and fascination, will be burnt up; but not one jot or tittle of all that Christ has spoken regarding the believer's future inheritance will fail of accomplishment. Sooner will the pillars of the universe crumble into atoms than that one assurance which Jesus has given of celestial bliss will fail of its accomplishment. His acknowledged love of truth He here places before His apostles as a basis on which they may rest their hopes of coming glory: 'If it were not so, I would have told you.' Could I, your faithful friend, deceive you? Has not candour ever characterized my dealings with you? Have not the three years of my intercourse with you furnished such proofs of my affection for you that I would not have allowed your minds to be buoyed up with hopes which I knew were never to be realized?

How precious is this assurance of our Lord to believers, that all the promises which Scripture holds out of eternal life will be realized in their experience! They entertain the hope that at the hour of death they shall be admitted to intimate communion with Jehovah, and bask in the sunshine of His love. *If it were not so, Jesus would have told them.* They believe that in the heavenly world they shall bear in their hands palms of victory, and wear on their heads crowns of life. *If it were not so, Jesus would have told them.* They hope to be the companions of angels, and associate with patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, in the kingdom of their Father. *If it were not so, Jesus would have told them.* They look forward with joy to the hour of their entrance into bliss, where they expect to be reunited to friends with whom they often took sweet counsel together. *If it were not so, Jesus would have told them.* They feel assured that they shall live for ever, and that through the ages of eternity they shall ever gain an increasing measure of bliss. *If it were not so, Jesus would have told them.*

Let the sentiment of the Redeemer, 'If it were not so, I

would have told you,' strengthen my faith in the reality of celestial bliss. He who cannot lie gives the assurance that all the hopes which the Bible inspires will be fully realized. Let not, then, one shade of doubt or unbelief dim my expectation of celestial bliss. Let me take Christ at His word, and firmly believe that all the promises of coming glory which He held out to His followers will be fulfilled to the very letter. Let joy fill my heart, as I reflect that immortality is no dream, but a grand reality, attested by Him who is the great fountain of truth. Let unwavering conviction in the certainty of future bliss be accompanied by diligent preparation for the period that shall see me entering on its possession. As a stimulus to exertion in the Christian life, let my eye be steadily fixed on the hour that shall usher me into the presence of that Redeemer who said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you;' and who shall welcome me to the place which He shall have prepared for me.

'One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er—
I'm nearer home to-day
Than I ever have been before.

'Nearer my Father's house,
Where the many mansions be;
Nearer the great white throne;
Nearer the crystal sea.

'Nearer the bound of life,
Where we lay our burdens down;
Nearer leaving the cross;
Nearer gaining the crown.'

XVIII.

A PLACE PREPARED.

'I go to prepare a place for you.'—JOHN XIV. 2.

AFTER all that the Bible reveals of the glory of heaven, it is still to a large extent to the believer, up to the hour of his entrance into it, an unknown world. Fancy strives, but strives in vain, to give shape to the descriptions of its surpassing bliss that are found in the sacred page. The figures which the inspired penmen employ to portray its happiness are indeed taken from the things of earth and time, but our spiritual vision is so weak that we can only discern a faint outline of the land that is very far off. Even the apostle, who was caught up to the third heavens, and permitted to look on its imperishable glories, could only say respecting them, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.' The representations, however, which Scripture gives of the celestial home of the redeemed are such as to warrant the belief that its happiness will infinitely exceed the loftiest expectations which on earth they formed respecting it. When we reflect on the greatness of the sacrifice that was made to purchase it; how Christ, to secure it, veiled for a time the splendours of His divinity, and in the nature of man submitted to a life of contumely and a death of agony; and how His almighty power is now exercised in fitting up mansions for all who have found redemption through His blood, we conclude that, as far as eternity exceeds the limits of time, so will

the bliss of heaven transcend the highest enjoyments of earth.

The blessed Redeemer here imparts the animating assurance, that when He returned to the right hand of His Father, He should be engaged in preparing a residence for His people. The preparation may be said to have begun on earth. His life of humiliation, the sorrows that wrung His soul, and the sufferings that were endured in His body, formed the foundation of the mighty work whereby eternal life should be secured to His followers. When He agonized in the garden, when He was exposed to the buffeting and scorn of His enemies, when He bled on the accursed tree, He was standing in their room, and removing obstacles out of the path that should conduct them to everlasting happiness. By His merit and mediation He erected a bridge that should connect earth with heaven, and across which His ransomed saints should pass from the vicissitudes of time to the glories of eternity.

The ascension of Christ to the right hand of His Father, there to act as the Intercessor of His people, was an essential part of the mighty preparation that He should make for their reception and felicity. Exalted though He is to the highest position of glory in the celestial world, He is no unconcerned spectator of the trials and difficulties which they have to encounter during their earthly probation. Seated on a throne of majesty, His love to them is as intense as when, for their sakes, He agonized on the cross and bowed His head in death. There He pleads their cause, presents in their behalf the merit of His sacrifice, and asks that eternal life may be their portion when death has severed their connection with things seen and temporal. He holds in His hand the title to their celestial inheritance, and no power in the wide universe can wrest it from Him.

But the direct reference of our Lord, in the passage now

under consideration, is doubtless to the preparation which He should make, after His ascension, of an abode for His people suited to their refined and glorified nature. He died not only to save them from the guilt and consequences of sin, but that He might purchase for them an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. If His blood was shed to secure their redemption, how transcendently glorious must be the place that was obtained at such a price! The happiness of their eternal abode will bear a proportion to the ardour of the love that He cherishes for them. As we attempt to realize the splendour of those mansions which, from the period of our Lord's ascension, He has been fitting up for His ransomed followers, our minds are lost and bewildered; figures drawn from the things of earth but faintly portray the glory that is yet to be revealed to us; and patience bids us wait till faith shall give place to sight, amid the cloudless manifestations of the divine presence. When, however, we reflect that He who has gone to prepare a place for His people is the Great and Supreme God, who has all the resources of the universe at His disposal, and whose power and wisdom are infinite, we may conclude that as eternity exceeds the limits of a moment, so will the bliss of their future inheritance transcend the highest conceptions of earth respecting it. What displays of His glory meet our gaze in the works of eternal nature! When we look on the sun shooting his rays of light to every corner of the vast system of which he is the centre—when we survey the harmony that characterizes the movements of the planetary bodies—when we think of the many worlds that float in the immensity of space, all created and kept in existence by the might of His arm, what exalted ideas do we obtain of His dignity and power! Now this glorious Being, who has garnished the universe with beauty, is He who is fitting up mansions of bliss for the occupancy of

the redeemed. If such illustrations of His power and love are exhibited in the works of external nature, how refined must be the felicity of those regions which He has prepared as the abode of His saints, for whose eternal salvation He submitted to a sacrifice so infinite! The mansions assigned to them will be suited to the glorified nature which they shall then possess. Every faculty will be an avenue through which a stream of joy, pure and unalloyed, will be conveyed to the soul. Every mansion may be an observatory from which the eye shall sweep over creation, even to its utmost bounds, and gather, from the wide range of objects that comes under survey, material for fresh gratitude and praise. Around each mansion will be a garden of delights, where the fruits never wither and the flowers never perish. Into those mansions nothing shall ever enter to hurt or to destroy; their foundations, laid by the hand of almighty power, will never decay; and the happiness enjoyed in them will not only suffer no interruption, but be ever on the increase as the ages of eternity roll on.

What an exalted view does the subject now contemplated open up of the eternal abode of the believer! The Redeemer Himself is its architect, and every department of it will bear the stamp of His wise and loving hand. Let the prospect of occupying a mansion which the Saviour has provided for me tend to raise my aspirations from the things of time to the glories of eternity. Why should my affections be so exclusively set on earth, when a mansion of bliss is prepared for me and awaiting my reception? One hour of heaven's joy will infinitely transcend a lifetime of earthly happiness. Let me, then, make diligent preparation for the period that shall see me cross the boundary-line that separates time from eternity, that thus an abundant entrance may be granted unto me into the everlasting kingdom.

'In the Christian's home in glory
There remains a land of rest;
There the Saviour's gone before me,
To fulfil my soul's request.

'He is fitting up my mansion,
Which eternally shall stand;
My stay shall not be transient
In that holy, happy land.

'Pain nor sickness e'er can enter,
Grief nor woe my lot shall share;
But in that celestial centre,
I a crown of life shall wear.'

XIX.

THE RECEPTION.

'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'—JOHN xiv. 3.

THE crowning proof of the Redeemer's affection for His people comes out in the passage which heads this evening's meditation. In the preceding clauses He had assured His disciples that in His Father's house were many mansions, and that when He returned to the celestial world He should prepare an abode for them. His regard for them did not, however, terminate there. He tells them that He should return to the earth, not only to rejoice with them in their deliverance from the sins and sorrows of time, but to welcome them to the possession of their eternal inheritance. Just as an individual, who has emigrated to a foreign country to provide not only for His own comfort, but that of dear relatives, whom he has left behind struggling with poverty and hardship, fits up a residence for them, and when it is completed, goes back to the fatherland to bring the loved ones of his heart to their new home; so the Redeemer is here represented as ascending to heaven to provide mansions of bliss for His saints, and then returning to earth to convey them to these mansions as their everlasting abode.

The time of the Redeemer's return to receive His people to Himself may, in an important sense, refer to the hour of their death. Then He comes to sustain and cheer them by His gracious influence as they enter the dark valley.

He strengthens their faith in His own merits, that thus no shade of unbelief may becloud their minds or dim their prospect of coming glory. He reminds them that He holds the keys of the invisible world, and that, relying on His promised help, they may look forward to their dissolution with calmness and composure. Amid the agonies of expiring nature, His grace is sufficient for them, and His strength is made perfect in their weakness. When death has done its work, and their immortal spirits take their departure from their corporeal tenements, the Redeemer is still with them, to conduct them to their appointed place in glory. When they appear at the bar of infinite justice, no condemning charge is brought against them, for all their sins He has transferred to Himself as their Surety. On the ground of His sacrifice and intercession, an abundant entrance is ministered unto them into their celestial abode. Bliss suited to their glorified nature He shall mete out to them.

Conducted by the Redeemer to His Father's house, and made occupants of its mansions, how enrapturing will be the bliss that shall fill their souls! *He will receive them to Himself.* He will view them as the purchase of His sufferings and the monuments of His grace. He will acknowledge them before His Father and the angels as the ransomed ones who are to shine and sparkle for ever as gems in His mediatorial crown. Their fellowship with Him will be of the closest and most endearing character, and ever be a source of the most refined enjoyment. What enlarged views of the divine character and perfections will converse with Him open up to their glorified minds! What will be their gratitude and joy as He reveals to them the great mysteries of Providence, and makes known the wise and merciful design of every dispensation towards them! As they contrast the misery and imperfection of earth with the felicity which they shall

then experience, and recollect that they owe their exalted position to the infinite love of the Redeemer, how loud and animated will be the song of praise which they shall celebrate to His name! And then, when they reflect that through the ages of eternity they are to dwell in the immediate presence of this Redeemer, admiring His glory and instructed by His wisdom, their cup of joy will indeed be full.

The words of our Lord, 'I will come again and receive you unto myself,' may also have reference to what is generally termed His second appearing—His coming at the close of this world's history. Not more certain is it that He once appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, than that He shall again appear, to place believers in full possession of the blessings of His redemption. 'For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.' The design of His second coming will be twofold,—not only to reward His friends, but to punish His enemies. Then the wicked will be eternally banished from His presence, and placed beyond the reach of His mercy. The bliss of the New Jerusalem will, on the other hand, be in reserve for His ransomed followers. Then their bodies will not only be raised to life, but shall bear a resemblance to the glorified humanity of the Redeemer Himself. They shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is. As they lift their eyes in triumph, and see Him seated in regal majesty on the great white throne, their ears shall be greeted with the joyful welcome, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Attending angels will then conduct them to the blissful mansions which infinite love has fitted up for them. As they pass through the fields of space, and draw near the portals of the celestial world, the shout will be raised,

'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in!' Then, when every ransomed saint shall have crossed the threshold that conducts to eternal bliss, the General Assembly and Church of the First-born shall be complete. As the mighty throng take their position before the throne of the Redeemer, each one arrayed in a robe that has been washed and made white in His blood, and bearing palms which are the emblems of the victories over sin and Satan which, through His grace, they were enabled to achieve, what ardour will characterize their devotions as they sing the song, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever'!

The crowning element in the bliss of the New Jerusalem will consist in the intimate fellowship with Christ that shall there be enjoyed. The saints shall see Him, not as He was seen in the days of His flesh,—a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs,—but arrayed in all the glories of His divine character. They shall see Him seated on the throne of the universe, while angels, in token of their lowly adoration, shall cast their crowns at His feet. Ardent will be the love which they shall cherish in their hearts towards Him, but not less ardent than the love that He shall bear to them. He shall view them as the fruit of His mediatorial work and the purchase of His sufferings. As He casts His eye over the vast plains of heaven, and beholds the glorified throng reflecting His own image, and destined to spend an eternity of bliss in His presence, what heart can conceive, what tongue can express, the transports of joy which will fill His soul! It was to this blessed consummation that He looked forward when He said to His disciples, 'That where I am, there ye may be also.' So intimately connected was His own happiness with the

happiness of His people, that He speaks as if His joy would be incomplete till they were with Him in His eternal home. Angels are the objects of His love; in the holiness that adorns their character they reflect His glory; and from the hour that they were called into being He has been the object of their unceasing adoration. But His ransomed saints stand to Him, in some respects, in a closer relationship than angels. He has the same nature with them; He acknowledges them as His brethren; He has a fellow-feeling with them in the trials and vicissitudes of their earthly experience. As the objects of His ardent love, He is looking forward with joy to the time when His desire will be fulfilled,—'That where I am, there ye may be also.'

As I reflect on the rich consolation that abounds in the sentiments of the Redeemer which have been under consideration during this and the last few Sabbath evenings, let me admire His condescension in unfolding them, and causing them to be recorded in His word. How often have these utterances been like stars hung out in the dark night of affliction to sustain and animate the believer! Let me, then, seek to draw from them the spiritual comfort which they are so well fitted to impart. Let the love which the Redeemer bears to His people—a love so tender, that He speaks of their presence with Him as essential to the completion of His own happiness—call out my affections towards Him. As I attempt to realize the glory of the celestial world, let me ever contemplate Jesus as the centre of its bliss. I cannot tell where heaven is, and I can but dimly comprehend the description which revelation gives of its felicity; but I know that Jesus, the eternal fountain of happiness, is there, and that His presence will diffuse joy among all the hosts of the redeemed. He whose disinterested love prompted Him to clothe Himself in human nature, and die a malefactor's death, that His people might

be ransomed from the guilt and consequences of sin, will, I may rest assured, admit them to closest fellowship with Himself, and make them partakers of ineffable bliss.

'The homes of earth are beautiful
When sanctified by grace,
But that one will be brighter still
Before our Father's face.
There will be no more parting,
No sighing, and no care;
No fading of the blooming cheek,
That oft awakes our fear.

'Yes! I love to think of heaven
As a place of glory bright,
Its jewell'd walls all brilliant
With floods of living light.
But, oh! methinks, that o'er the thought
A nameless charm is thrown,
That twines in beauty round the heart,
That *heaven is a home.*'

XX.

CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION GLORY A TYPE OF HIS HEAVENLY.

'And it came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias; who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.'—LUKE IX. 28-31.

THE experience of believers is varied in its character. They do not always possess the same feelings of happiness and comfort, but are at times subject to spiritual depression and grief. Just as, in the external world, the sunshine succeeds the storm, so, in the heart of the Christian, distressing doubts and fears will sometimes be followed by spiritual joy and a comforting sense of the divine favour.

These remarks find a forcible illustration in the case of the disciples, when they were called to witness a display of their Master's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Their minds had just been overshadowed with gloom by the announcement which He had made to them of His approaching sufferings and death. Sorrow filled their hearts as they heard Him tell of the pain and ignominy to which He should be subjected. But the dark cloud which had settled on their minds was soon to be dispelled. Certain of their number were to be favoured with a lively view of His glory, to strengthen their faith in His Messiahship, and thus fit them for the important work of publishing salvation through His name.

The place on which the three honoured disciples were to witness the transfiguration of their Master was a mountain. Till lately it was supposed that Tabor was the spot on which Christ's glory was exhibited; but the remains of a Roman fortress having been discovered on it, showing that at the commencement of the Christian era it must have been a military encampment, the likelihood is that a position more retired was selected. It is a remarkable circumstance that mountains have often been chosen by God as scenes on which He has exhibited His glory and made known His will. It was, for example, on Mount Horeb that He appeared to Moses in a burning bush; on Mount Sinai that He gave him the law; and on Mount Pisgah that He imparted to him a view of the promised land. Christ Himself frequently selected a mountain as the place on which He prayed and held communion with His Father. Now that He was to be transfigured, He retired to a mountain with the three favoured disciples. A mountain was a spot peculiarly fitted for the exhibition of His glory. The stillness of the scene, the beauty of nature's works stretching out as far as the eye could reach, and the wide expanse of heaven above, were all calculated to impress the apostles with feelings of solemnity, and prepare them for the illustrious display of their Master's glory which was to be vouchsafed to them.

It was while the Redeemer was in the act of prayer that the transfiguration took place: 'As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered.' Prayer characterized the whole of His career as man's Redeemer. At His baptism, when about to enter on His public ministry, He prayed. When He agonized in Gethsemane, and was about to offer Himself a sacrifice for the world's sin, He prayed. When about to bid farewell to His disciples, and ascend to the right hand of His Father, His hands were lifted over them in prayer. As a divine Being, and the possessor of all things,

prayer was to Him in one sense unnecessary. But as a man, and impressed with human feelings and sympathies, He addressed the throne of His Father, and supplicated spiritual strength for Himself and blessings for His followers. Now that He was to be transfigured, He prayed—doubtless that the faith of the three disciples in His Messiahship might be confirmed, and their views of the glory of His character enlarged.

From the language employed by the evangelists, the change which took place in the appearance of Christ after His transfiguration must have been striking and glorious. 'The fashion of His countenance,' says Luke, 'was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering.' 'His face,' says Matthew, 'did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.' 'His raiment,' says Mark, 'became shining, exceeding white as snow.' The face of Moses, after he had been conversing with God on Mount Sinai, was so dazzling that the Israelites could not look upon it. That glory, however, was only reflected glory; a few beams of that resplendent majesty which surrounds the Divine Being, from whose presence he had just come, rested upon him. But the glory that now shone forth in the person of Christ was not reflected, but essential glory. His nature is divine; He is equal with the Father; the perfections of Deity centre in Him. In heaven, before His incarnation, the sceptre of the universe was His. There He was the adored of angels; while even upon earth, and in presence of His enemies, illustrations of His almighty power were given in the miracles which He wrought. The glory of His divine character now shone forth upon the mount without a guise in the presence of the three disciples. While engaged in carrying out the great plan of human redemption, His divinity was veiled by the human form which He had assumed. Then He was known as a man of sorrows, and regarded as a root out of a dry ground,

having no form and comeliness. Now, however, in the presence of His disciples, He laid aside His disguise. They were eye-witnesses of His majesty and His excellent glory. They saw His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. In the deeds of wonder which He had wrought, they saw so many proofs that He was the Messiah; but they had now evidence of His divinity from His very appearance.

While the Redeemer was thus transfigured in view of His disciples, two messengers from the heavenly world appeared, to testify their interest in the scene that was being enacted. These were Moses and Elias, men who had played a prominent part amid the stirring events of Old Testament history. Fifteen hundred years had rolled away from the time that Moses stood on Pisgah, and viewed the land that was a faint type of the blissful region whence he had now come. As the leader of God's people not only from the bondage of Egypt, but through the perils of the Red Sea and the pilgrimage of the desert, as the lawgiver under the legal dispensation, his name holds a distinguished place amid the worthies who, on the ladder of faith, had ascended to the realms of bliss from amid the types and symbols of the old economy. Before the termination of his earthly labours, he had foretold to his countrymen the coming of the Messiah: 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me;' and now He comes, as the representative of the law, to bear testimony to the divinity of His character. He appeared evidently in a visible form; and the likelihood is, that his body, the place of whose burial had never been known, was, before this interview which he held with Christ, raised to life, that it might be to glorified saints in the heavenly world an earnest of the final resurrection.

The other individual who appeared on this occasion was Elias, or, as he is called in the Old Testament, Elijah. He

was the head of the prophetic, as Moses was the head of the legal, dispensation. Much had he suffered in the cause of God on earth, but on him was conferred the distinguished honour of being translated to glory without experiencing the agonies of death. Nine hundred years had elapsed since he had thus exchanged the labours of the Church below for the rewards of the Church in heaven. Now he appeared as the representative of Old Testament prophets, to re-echo what they had foretold of His person and work, and point Him out to His followers as the long-promised Messiah. In the presence of these two illustrious visitants from the celestial world at the Transfiguration, the law and the prophets were doing homage to Him at whose feet before long all the angels and glorified saints of heaven should cast their crowns. What could tend so much to confirm the faith of the disciples in His Messiahship, and elevate their conceptions of His character, as the presence of these distinguished personages from the realms of bliss, and the testimony which they bore to Him? Peter, many years afterwards, and when drawing near the termination of his earthly course, felt that the remembrance of the scene which he witnessed on the mount imparted additional lustre to his hopes of eternal glory: 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty.'

The theme on which these illustrious visitants from the heavenly world discoursed was, *the decease which Jesus should accomplish at Jerusalem.* Had revelation been silent on the point, numerous conjectures might have been formed regarding the subject on which the conversation turned. One might suppose that, as Moses and Elias had played a conspicuous part amid the events of Old Testament history, they would have talked of the scenes and difficulties of their earthly labours. Or, as they had just come from the

many crowns, among others the crown of a ransomed and glorified Church, angels bow before Him; and all the ranks of the redeemed, viewing Him as the source of all the bliss they enjoy, blend, in the exuberance of their gratitude, their voices as they sing the song, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.' With the prospect of seeing the Saviour as He is, the centre of heaven's glory, let me seek more intimate communion with Him on earth. Let me study the excellences of His character, as these are portrayed in the volume of inspiration, that I may in some measure be qualified to gaze on His unclouded splendours in the realms of everlasting bliss.

'Go, worship at Immanuel's feet,
See in His face what wonders meet;
Earth is too narrow to express
His worth, His glory, or His grace.

'Nor earth, nor seas, nor sun, nor stars,
Nor heaven His full resemblance bears;
His beauties we can never trace
Till we behold Him face to face.

'Oh, let me climb those higher skies,
Where storms and darkness never rise!
There He displays His power abroad,
And shines and reigns th' Incarnate God.'

XXI.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN HEAVEN.

'The seven spirits which are before the throne.'—REV. I. 4.

ACCORDING to the best critics, the reference in this passage is to the Holy Spirit, the third person in the glorious Trinity. Other interpretations have indeed been put upon it, but it seems evident from the context that the Being introduced is the Divine Spirit. He is here coupled with the Father and the Son; and it is natural to suppose, that when two persons of the Godhead are introduced, the third party mentioned should be the Holy Spirit. It would be contrary to all the teaching of the Bible to believe that creatures, however exalted, could be associated with the Divine Being in an invocation of grace and spiritual blessings. The conclusion, therefore, seems inevitable, that the reference in the passage is to the Holy Spirit. The term 'seven spirits' applied to Him is in accordance with the metaphorical style which abounds in the Book of Revelation. The number *seven* is often employed in the Bible to denote fulness or completeness; and the phrase 'seven spirits,' applied to the third person of the Godhead, points Him out as a Being possessed of infinite perfection.

The subject of our present meditation is one on which the Bible, if not altogether silent, throws comparatively little light. While it abounds with representations of the glory that surrounds the Redeemer, and the work in which He is engaged in the celestial world, its references to the

position and agency of the Holy Spirit in that world are few. The honour that has been conferred upon Christ as the reward of His mediatorial work, and the happiness to which the redeemed at death are admitted, are the themes to which prominence is given by the inspired writers in their descriptions of the heavenly state. The immediate results of Christ's humiliation and sacrifice are placed in the foreground of the picture, and are surrounded by a lustre so dazzling that objects in the background are but dimly and imperfectly perceived. There cannot, however, be a doubt that the Holy Spirit, as one of the persons of the Godhead, will not only be an object of praise to the myriads of glorified ones who surround the eternal throne, but that, as the author of conversion, and the agent who qualified the redeemed for the positions of bliss which they occupy, the fellowship which they will hold with Him shall be of the closest and most endearing character.

That we may rightly understand the position which the Holy Spirit will occupy in the celestial world, it is necessary that we keep clearly in view the representations which Scripture gives of Him. His individuality is distinctly taught by the inspired writers. The term *Holy Spirit* is not, as Unitarians aver, descriptive of a mere influence issuing from the Divine Being, but points Him out as a person distinct from the Father and the Son. The individuality of the Holy Spirit may be argued from various considerations founded on the word of God. The term *pneuma*, in the Greek Testament, which is rendered *spirit* in the English version, is in itself neuter, but when applied to the third person in the Godhead, has always the masculine prefixed to it; which can only be accounted for on the supposition that the reference is to a person, and not to a mere influence. The actions of an intelligent agent, frequently ascribed to the Holy Spirit, prove His personality. Thus, for example, we are told that the apostles

were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, and that He would not suffer them to go into Bithynia. He is represented as revealing the divine will. Thus He informed the aged Simeon that he should not die till he had seen the Messiah. It is said of Him that He suggests truth to the mind. Thus Jesus told His disciples, that when they should appear before rulers to answer for their faith, the Holy Spirit would teach them in the same hour what they ought to say. He also assured them that all the instructions which He had imparted to them during His earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit would afterwards call up to their remembrance. Frequently, both in the Old and New Testaments, is He represented as the agent who converts and sanctifies the heart, and applies to mankind the blessings of redemption. The personal actions thus attributed to the Spirit clearly teach His individuality, and that the term is not employed to describe a mere influence.

Equally strong is the evidence in support of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The names of God, which could not without blasphemy be given to a creature, are applied to Him. The essential perfections of Godhead, such as eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, are ascribed to Him. Divine works, such as creation, the performance of miracles, and the regeneration of the heart, are attributed to Him. He is also represented as the object of supreme worship; and His name is frequently associated with the Father and the Son in such a way as clearly to indicate that He is a divine Being.

Such, then, is the view which Scripture gives of the Holy Spirit. He is a personal and divine agent. It is in the same aspect that we must contemplate Him in the position that He now occupies in the celestial world. As one of the persons of the Godhead, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Through all the coming ages of

eternity, He will be recognised as a divine Being, but, at the same time, as distinct from the Father and the Son. While, as God, divine worship will ever be ascribed to Him, He will bear a close and intimate relation to the redeemed, from the part He performed in the great work of their salvation. By the death and mediation of Christ eternal life was purchased for them; but it is by the influences of the Spirit that the offer is accepted. If the joy of Christ is great as He contemplates the fruit of His sufferings in multitudes of ransomed sinners, who have found pardon through His blood, similar must be the joy of the Spirit as He reflects that it was by His gracious agency that these glorified ones were raised to the exalted position which they now occupy. As it was by His renewing influence that they underwent a sanctifying change, were assimilated to the divine image, and fitted for their heavenly inheritance, how thrilling will be the satisfaction with which He shall contemplate the completion in eternity of that work which was begun and carried on amid the temptations of earth and time! If the architect, after erecting a magnificent structure, which excites the wonder and admiration of the age in which he lives, regards it with delight, what will be the joy of the Holy Spirit as He beholds myriads of redeemed ones, freed by His grace from the pollutions of sin and reflecting the purity of the divine character, bearing victorious palms, emblems of the triumphs over sin which through His aid they were enabled to achieve, and destined through everlasting ages to increase in holiness and bliss!

While the Holy Spirit will ever regard the redeemed with feelings of thrilling interest, how ardent will be the love which they shall bear to Him, and how close and intimate will be the fellowship which they shall enjoy with Him! They shall ever regard Him as the agent who first brought them to a sense of their guilt, and led them to the

cross for mercy. As memory calls up the varied incidents of their earthly experience, they shall find that, from the hour of their conversion, the Spirit had watched over them, and aided them in every time of difficulty and trial. They shall then learn what, during the days of their pilgrimage, they may have been slow to realize,—that every holy resolution which they formed, every triumph which they gained over sin and temptation, and every advance which they made in their path heavenwards, were more or less the result of His gracious influence. They shall then know that the spiritual consolation, which they oftentimes experienced in the dark night of sorrow and affliction, flowed from Him, as the Comforter whom the Redeemer promised to His disciples before He left the world. How close and endearing will thus be the tie that shall unite the Holy Spirit to the ransomed in the celestial world! There cannot be a doubt that, as during the period of their earthly sojourn He acted as their counsellor and guide, and enabled them to comprehend the doctrines of His written word, so, through the coming ages of eternity, He will still open up new truths to their enlarged minds, and reveal fresh glories in the divine character. Although the work of sanctification is completed at the hour of their admission to the celestial world, and they are then perfected in holiness, the Spirit may still exert His influence upon them by bringing out, in their glorified natures, an ever-increasing resemblance to His own image.

What an interesting theme of study does the prospect of fellowship with the Holy Spirit in the celestial world open up to the believer on earth! If I am a subject of His influence, then I can not only say, that by His grace I am what I am, but to His agency I shall owe the exalted position which I hope hereafter to occupy. Then let me study His character and place myself under His teaching now, that I may be fitted for holding immediate communion

with Him in the realms of bliss. Let me realize my need of His aid and direction as I pursue my course heavenward. Let me ever bear in mind, that without Him I can make no progress in holiness, nor gain a meetness for my future inheritance. Then, when I have terminated my earthly warfare, He shall perfect me in purity; my fellowship with Him shall be close and intimate; and, under His guidance, I shall gain enlarged views of the divine character and perfections.

'When my farewells I am taking,
And these lower rooms forsaking,
To my upper home betaking,—
Mighty Spirit, comfort!

'Holy Spirit, strength in weakness;
Holy Spirit, health in sickness;
Give me comfort, patience, meekness;—
Mighty Spirit, comfort!

'Ah, Thou wilt not then forsake me,
Strong in weakness Thou wilt make me,
To Thy bosom Thou wilt take me;—
Mighty Spirit, comfort!'—BONAR.

XXII.

THE CROWN OF LIFE.

'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'
—REV. II. 10.

THE words which are the theme of this evening's meditation form part of the epistle which was addressed by the Redeemer to the angel of the Church at Smyrna. By the angel of the Church is meant the individual who presided in its assemblies and conducted its public devotions. The exhortation, however, is to be regarded as presented through him to all the members of that Church. If we consider the peculiar circumstances in which they were now placed, we shall at once perceive the appropriateness of the counsel which was here addressed to them. Previous to the introduction of Christianity among them, they were sunk in all the darkness of heathenism. The city in which they dwelt was indeed renowned for its splendour and magnificence, but its inhabitants were living without God in the world. Superstition, idolatry, and vice had so blinded their minds and debased their hearts, that, with regard to those who had renounced heathenism and embraced the Christian religion, it might emphatically be said, that they were as *brands plucked from the burning.* Before their conversion, they had been the willing slaves of sin; but having entered on a life of holiness, they had to strive against all the corruptions of their depraved nature, resist the allurements of a wicked world, and seek conformity to the character of Christ, in whose service they had engaged.

The Christians at Smyrna would, in these circumstances, be exposed to numerous temptations. In their spiritual career, dangers would beset them on every side. They with whom they had associated in their unregenerate state would seek to draw them back to the sinful pleasures in which they had been wont to indulge, while vice in every form would be ready to allure them from the paths of holiness and virtue. The many trials through which they had to pass may be inferred from the language in which the Saviour here addresses them. They are represented as in a state of warfare, having to contend with enemies bent on their destruction. Jesus, with the view of inspiring them with vigour for the conflict, speaks to them in language fitted to cheer and sustain them in the midst of their tribulation, and to animate them with the desire of overcoming all their spiritual foes, in view of the bright reward that awaited them: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' And there is something animating in the thought that these words of the Redeemer cheered on many of the martyrs of the early Church, when called upon to sacrifice their lives in attachment to His cause. It was so with Polycarp, who, not many years after the apostolic era, was the angel of this Church. When brought before his persecutors, he was told that if he would blaspheme Christ he should be set at liberty. Looking at his accusers with a calm and unruffled countenance, he replied: 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath never wronged me; how, then, shall I blaspheme my Saviour and King?' Shortly afterwards his body was burned at the stake, and his immortal spirit ascended to Him in whose cause he had suffered.

The counsel, '*Be thou faithful unto death*,' addressed by Christ to the believer, implies that the latter is engaged in a conflict in which courage and perseverance are expected of him. How frequently in the word of God are Christians

reminded of the temptations which beset them, and exhorted to continue stedfast in their Christian profession! Do they not oftentimes realize in their experience the truth of the declaration, that *through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom of God?* The world, the devil, and the flesh all blend their influence to secure their final overthrow. It is seldom, at the present day, when the principles of religious liberty are understood and enjoyed, that the followers of Christ are called upon to prove their attachment to Him by the sacrifice of their lives. But fidelity to His cause may be manifested in the midst of Christian privilege, when the sword is sheathed and the flames are quenched. Unwavering constancy and unshaken attachment may be exhibited by those who never encountered the storm of persecution. The religion of the believer is one to which the world is opposed. Its hatred and prejudices are all directed against it. All the saints in Christ Jesus, who by divine grace are struggling against sin, striving after conformity to the image of their Master, and seeking to have their affections set upon the world of bliss, feel how the things of earth and time tend to retard their heavenward progress. Then Satan, their great enemy, is ever on the watch to lure them from the path of rectitude. While foes without are anxious for their ruin, they are liable to be ensnared by the corruptions of their own depraved nature, which prove the most powerful hindrance to their advancement in the divine life.

In the midst of the conflict in which the believer is called to engage, he is urged by the Redeemer to unwavering fidelity. When he is exposed to the evil influence of the ungodly and profane around him, when the darts of the wicked one are being directed against him, when he is in danger of yielding to the dictates of his own depraved nature, the Captain of his salvation whispers in his soul: 'Hold stedfast the profession of your faith; so long as life

lasts, maintain a firm attachment to my cause on earth; in the hour of death bid defiance to all your spiritual foes, and strive to be more than a conqueror as you pass through the valley that separates time from eternity.'

While the Redeemer urges His followers to maintain fidelity to His cause, He does not leave them to rely upon their own strength. In every struggle with temptation He is ever near, to impart to them needed help. He has Himself spoiled principalities and powers, and His sympathies are with them in all their conflicts. His triumph renders theirs certain. There is no difficulty into which they may be cast out of which His grace will not extricate them. There are no afflictions which they may be called upon to endure under which His grace will not sustain them. There is no situation, however trying, in which they can be placed, but His strength will be made perfect in their weakness. The weapons with which they are called upon to fight are furnished from the armoury of the Captain of their salvation. He who gave the admonition, '*Be thou faithful unto death*,' has also furnished the assurance, '*My grace is sufficient for thee.*'

While strength for the hour of conflict is promised to the believer, he is also sustained by the prospect of a glorious reward. He who urges to fidelity also holds out the promise, '*I will give thee a crown of life.*' This honour which awaits the faithful follower of Christ will be conferred as the result of free and unmerited grace. It is not for a moment to be supposed that the zeal and devotedness of the believer will ever procure for him a title to the felicity of the heavenly world. Salvation, from the period that the awakened sinner breathes the prayer, '*God, be merciful to me a sinner*,' to the hour that, as a ransomed and glorified saint, he takes his station before the eternal throne, is all of grace. But while the Christian will not be rewarded for his works, he shall be rewarded according to

his works. The more ardent his piety and the more unwearied his zeal, the greater the amount of happiness that shall be measured out to him in the heavenly world.

The reward which the Saviour here promises to confer upon His faithful follower is a *crown of life.* In ancient times, crowns were worn as emblems of honour or badges of victory. In the Olympic games, which were celebrated for the exhibition of racing and wrestling, the successful competitors were adorned with wreaths and garlands, in acknowledgment of the skill and dexterity which they had displayed in their various exercises. Soldiers, too, who had distinguished themselves on the field of battle, had crowns bestowed upon them by the hands of their general, in presence of the whole army. In every age a crown has been the grand object of ambition, to obtain which neither toils nor sacrifices have been spared. Now a crown is the reward which the Saviour will confer upon His faithful follower. But how different the crown that shall be worn by the believer from that which adorns the brow of an earthly potentate! It is emphatically termed a crown of life. While all earthly honours and distinctions will cease with time, the crown worn by the glorified saint will increase in lustre as age after age of eternity rolls on. The crown with which the successful competitor in the ancient games was decorated was only a chaplet of evergreens, which, however verdant on the day of his triumph, soon became parched and withered. But the crown which Christ promises to the believer, and by which his faith and zeal shall be distinguished, is a crown of glory, the worth of which the wealth of the world could not purchase, and the nature of which is *incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* The crowns of earth are by their possessors retained at most but a few years; the chaplet that encircles the brow of the monarch cannot shield him from the arrows of the last enemy. But the Christian, with his crown

irradiated by rays from the throne of the Eternal, shall live in a region where death is swallowed up in victory, and into which nothing shall ever enter to hurt or to destroy.

Such is the reward that will be conferred on the devoted follower of Christ. Can I cherish the hope that a crown of life will be my portion when my earthly course has terminated? Let the blissful prospect awaken within me the earnest desire to pursue with increased ardour the path that leads to endless glory. In proportion to the vigilance I now display, the efforts after holiness I put forth, and the earnestness I manifest in working out my salvation, will be the greatness of my reward, the brightness of my crown. Let me strive manfully against all the temptations that beset me in my Christian career. Soon will the warfare be terminated, heaven entered, and the crown of life won. The Captain of Salvation knows all the difficulties I have to encounter; and as I pursue my heavenward course, He will furnish me with supplies of grace for every trying hour. He has already vanquished all my spiritual enemies, and, relying upon His promised aid, I have nothing to fear from their attacks. He to whose cause I am attached limits His power by nothing short of omnipotence. He that is with me is greater than all they that be against me.

'Yes, I know that I shall conquer,
Though sore and hard the fight may be;
I know, I know, I shall be more than victor,
Through Him who won the fight for me.

'I fight, not fearful of the issue,—
My victory is sure and near;
Yet not the less with hand and eye all watchful,
Grasp I my buckler and my spear.

'For I must fight if I would conquer,
'Tis not by flight that fields are won;
And I must conquer if I would inherit
The victor's joy, and crown, and throne.'—BONAR.

XXIII.

DESIRE FOR HEAVENLY BLISS.

'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'—NUM. XXIII. 10.

HOW beautiful is the wish which these words express! and yet they were the words of a man whose heart was a stranger to the power of religion,—a man who died, as he had lived, a hardened and impenitent transgressor. The character of Balaam, who gave utterance to this desire, it is at first view somewhat difficult to comprehend. In some respects we might be disposed to say that he was a good man. He obtained revelations from God, and, generally speaking, those to whom God made known His will were men of upright conduct. At times he showed a desire to follow only the course which the Almighty pointed out to him. His mind was evidently enlightened with regard to the duties which God has enjoined upon man. He was acquainted to some extent with the great plan of human redemption, which ages afterwards was to be accomplished by the mediation and sacrifice of the Messiah. He was not ignorant of a future state of existence; and he knew that death, to a good man, is the introduction to eternal bliss. The desire that he expressed when he stood on the heights of Moab and looked down upon the Israelites, living in the enjoyment of the divine favour,—'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'—was not only beautiful in itself, but it was a wish which every man ought to cherish.

Such is the bright side of Balaam's character. But there is a dark side to the picture. With all his knowledge, with all the advantages which he possessed from the interviews that he held with Jehovah, with all his professions of sincerity, his character is one of the most infamous that is brought before us in the sacred narrative. As we study his history—as we read of his deceit, his treachery, his hypocrisy, and the foul means that he employed to accomplish his purposes, we must come to the conclusion that he was one of the basest of men, and an instance of the deep depravity to which an individual will sometimes sink. His case resembles that of thousands, who, while they desire to have a well-grounded hope for eternity, refuse to lead a holy life, without which there can be no true preparation for a dying hour. And yet the wish which Balaam here expressed may form an appropriate prayer to the believer as he meditates on the glories of his heavenly inheritance.

Leaving out of view the character of Balaam, who gave expression to these words, let us regard them as a prayer which the genuine Christian may offer when contemplating the solemn realities of the world to come. The prayer has reference to two important objects,—the first, that we may die the death of the righteous; and the second, that our last end may be like his. The two ideas, though closely connected, have distinct ends in view. By dying the death of the righteous, we are to understand the calmness and composure which characterize the closing hours in the earthly life of the believer, when sustained by the consolations of the religion of heaven; and the words, 'Let my last end be like his,' are a prayer, that when death ushers us into the immediate presence of God as our Judge, the bliss of eternity may be our portion. Thus interpreted, the passage is, in the first place, a prayer that, at the period of our departure from the world, we may realize the happiness and comfort which the possession of the divine favour

secures to the righteous. Death, although we are called so frequently to contemplate it, is a solemn event. Whether we view it as the instrument that sunders our connection with time, or admits us to the realities of eternity, we must regard it with feelings of profound awe. 'Through fear of it,' says the apostle, 'men are all their lifetime subject to bondage.' The infidel, in the time of health and prosperity, may afford to laugh at death; but how does his scepticism vanish, like chaff before the wind, at the approach of the grim messenger!

But while mankind in general regard death with feelings of mysterious dread, it is frequently contemplated by the believer not only with composure, but hailed with rapture. Balaam knew this when he uttered the prayer, 'Let me die the death of the righteous.' He had often seen the sinner dying without hope, and unsustained by the consolations of religion. But living as he did in proximity to the people of God, and acquainted as he was to some extent with the doctrines which they believed, he must have often heard of the peace and composure which characterized the dying hours of many of them when supported by the divine presence. However unwilling he was to regulate his life by the requirements of God's law, he desired that when his dying hour came, he might, like holy ones among the Israelites, be comforted by fellowship with Jehovah. Balaam's desire is one that finds an echo in the breast of every believer. His prayer is, that when the hour of his departure comes—that hour which will see him bidding farewell to all that he holds dear on earth—he may possess that faith which cheered departed saints in their dying moments. What but the consolations of the Christian religion can bear up the spirit amid the agonies of dissolution? The physician may alleviate bodily pain, friends may speak words of sympathy in the ear; but fellowship

with the Redeemer then enjoyed, and an assurance of the divine love filling the heart, will impart a peace which the wealth of the world cannot purchase. Then it is that the promises of God's word, like stars in an intensely dark night, are seen shining with peculiar lustre, and furnishing to the soul a foretaste of the glory about to be revealed. What individual, with a heart rightly impressed with the solemnities of death and the issues to which it leads, would not desire that the experience now described may be his, and that when he comes to die his death may be that of the righteous?

Balaam not only prayed that he might die the death of the righteous, but that his last end might be like his. From these words it is evident that Balaam believed in the doctrine of a future state. He may have derived his knowledge from the traditions that had come down from patriarchal times, or from direct communications that he had held with the Israelites. To what extent he was acquainted with the nature of the bliss to which the righteous are admitted at death we are not informed, but doubtless his ideas on the subject were dim as compared with the resplendent light that is reflected on it by the teaching of the New Testament. Jesus, by His gospel, has brought life and immortality to light. He has drawn aside the veil which would otherwise have hid eternal realities from the view of mortals, and afforded some glimpses of those joys which are the portion of the righteous. The knowledge which is thus imparted of the celestial world is indeed limited—only a faint outline of its glories is sketched—the full measure of its bliss our feeble faculties cannot comprehend; and even the apostle, who was caught up to the third heavens, could only say respecting their happiness, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath

prepared for them that love Him.' Enough, however, is revealed to warrant the firm belief that the reality will infinitely exceed our loftiest expectations. What renders the teaching of the Bible respecting the glories of the eternal world so unspeakably valuable, is that it makes known the terms whereby admission to that bliss is secured. It unfolds the glorious truth, that the immortal happiness which mankind forfeited by sin has been purchased by the mediation of Christ; and that by the simple exercise of faith in His merit and sacrifice, they may gain a title to bliss infinitely higher in value than that enjoyed by Adam in Eden. The question, 'What must I do to be saved?' which proud philosophy could not answer, and in attempting to solve which blood was made to flow on many heathen altars, is met by the declaration of the gospel, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' Guided by the light of God's word, the sinner learns how the wish expressed in the words, '*Let my last end be that of the righteous*,' may be realized.

Let the consideration of Balaam's prayer awaken me to earnest self-examination. Like him, my desire is that I may die the death of the righteous, and that my last end may be like his. But his case teaches the melancholy truth, that a man may wish to die a child of God, and yet die in a state of estrangement from Him—may hope to obtain eternal happiness, and yet come short of it. Let me, then, guard against the fatal delusion of supposing that a peaceful death can be secured unless that has been preceded by a holy life, or that an eternity of bliss can be gained unless I am united to Christ by faith, and my character bears a resemblance to His spotless image. Let me live the life of the righteous, and then I may expect to die the death of the righteous; let me grow in ripeness for heaven, and then I shall possess the assurance that its joys will one day be mine.

'How bless'd the righteous are
When they resign their breath!
No wonder Balaam wished to share
In such a happy death.

'"Oh! let me die," said he,
"The death the righteous do;
When life is ended, let me be
Found with the faithful few."

'But Balaam's wish was vain,
His heart was insincere;
He thirsted for unrighteous gain,
And sought a portion here.'—NEWTON.

XXIV.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN—HOW SECURED.

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'—PHIL. II. 12, 13.

GROWTH in holiness is, in other words, growth in ripeness for the services of the celestial world. To the attainment of this object the apostle here earnestly entreats the Philippian believers. The follower of Christ does not reach perfection in a day, or a week, or a year. The process whereby his nature undergoes a sanctifying change is not instantaneous, but gradual. It is step by step that he is led along the path that conducts to glory; and never till he has laid aside the pilgrim's staff, and entered upon his everlasting reward, will he be free from every taint of sin and imperfection. Just as, in the vegetable world, the plant reaches its highest point of excellence after passing through different stages of development, so, in the work of holiness carried on in the heart of the believer, one grace after another appears and gathers strength, until he stands perfected in the immediate presence of his Maker amid the enjoyments of eternity. To this increase of preparation for the bliss of heaven the apostle thus urges believers: '*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*'

Salvation is a term of wide and extensive import. It includes in it all that is involved in the eternal welfare of man. Sometimes it denotes simply deliverance from the

guilt of sin. In the passage now under consideration, it signifies the principle of holiness which is implanted in the heart of every individual who becomes a subject of the Holy Spirit's influence. While divine grace is necessary, absolutely necessary, to begin and carry on the work of sanctification, human effort must be combined with divine assistance to further it. The will of the believer must act in harmony with the will of the Almighty when he desires to work out his salvation. God does not operate upon men by His Spirit as He would upon lifeless machines that have no power in themselves to act. He treats them as rational and intelligent beings, endowed with faculties which render them capable of putting forth exertion. Hence, while in Scripture believers are taught to ascribe all the glory of their redemption to the grace of God, they are at the same time told to believe, to pray, to grow in grace, to seek conformity to the image of Christ, to fight the good fight of faith, to run with patience the Christian race. Human energy must thus be combined with the influence of the Spirit to secure the conversion and sanctification of the heart.

The exhortation of the apostle implies a diligent use of the means of grace. It is by a careful observance of the ordinances of the gospel that we may expect to work out our salvation, and thus advance in holiness. The Divine Spirit makes the truth of Scripture the instrument of effecting our sanctification; and it is while we are studying that truth that we may expect to be the subject of His influences. He renders the preaching of the gospel a means not only of converting sinners, but of edifying saints, and building them up in their most holy faith; and it is, therefore, when we listen prayerfully to its proclamation that we may look for the assistance of the Spirit to enable us to work out our salvation. It is in answer to prayer that divine grace and strength are imparted to the believer,

to help him in his infirmities; and it is, therefore, when we abound in this exercise—when we come frequently and fervently to a throne of grace—when our souls are, as it were, bathed in the spirit of devotion, that we are likely to increase in holiness, work out our salvation, and grow in ripeness for heaven. It is by self-examination that we come to realize our true position in the sight of an omniscient God, and feel our need of divine assistance to help us in our journey heavenward; and it is, therefore, when we diligently attend to this duty that we are in a position to comply with the exhortation of the apostle, and *work out our salvation.* Means bear the same relation to success in religion that they do to success in worldly pursuits. The man who aims at wealth employs the means to acquire it. The man whose mind is bent on pleasure follows the course which he believes will lead to it. The man who desires high attainments in knowledge uses the means whereby such attainments are secured. So, in like manner, the Christian who is anxious to work out his salvation and advance in holiness must, while relying upon a strength higher than his own, make a diligent use of all the means which God has appointed as helps to his faith.

The apostle, with the view of encouraging believers to *work out their salvation*, assures them that it is *God who worketh in them.* The word rendered *worketh* has a stronger meaning in the original than appears in our English translation. It denotes working with efficacy—working so as to secure the desired end. When God intends the salvation of a sinner, He does not cease His operations until that salvation is obtained. *He who hath begun the good work will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ.*

The Christian is thus not left to his own strength when he seeks to work out his salvation. Were divine assistance not imparted, he would assuredly come short of redemption.

His enemies are so numerous and powerful, that, if he trusted to himself, they would drag him to ruin. Satan, his great adversary, who goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, is ever anxious to subvert his faith. The allurements of the world are in danger of ensnaring him, and he is ever liable to yield to the corrupt influences of his own heart; but amid all the opposition he encounters, he has the assurance that God, who has begun the work of grace, will carry it on. Christ, who urges the believer to diligence in working out his salvation, also gives the encouraging promise, '*My grace is sufficient for thee.*' What a rich source of consolation does the declaration of the apostle, '*It is God who worketh in you,*' open up to the followers of Christ in their efforts to secure the redemption of their souls! Amid all the difficulties that beset them, it reminds them that their salvation does not depend on their variable frames and feelings, on their feeble faith and languishing devotion, but that it rests on the eternal purpose of God, and will assuredly in the end be secured to them.

Let my fervent prayer be, that, as a pilgrim to the celestial world, I may comply with the exhortation of the apostle, and work out my salvation with fear and trembling. Every day that passes over my head is bringing me nearer to the termination of my earthly course. How important that, as I advance in years, I should grow in grace and ripeness for the unsullied bliss of the celestial world! Earthly pursuits, however valuable in themselves, will avail me nothing when the messenger of death summons me to bid farewell to time, and take my place amid the realities of eternity. But if possessed of an interest in Christ, and as the result of the influences of His Spirit, I am conformed to His holy image, I shall have gained a treasure, compared with which all the wealth of the world is as dust in the balance. Let me, then, strive to make my

calling and election in the Lord Jesus sure. Let me employ with diligence the means of grace, that these may prove instrumental in promoting the spirituality of my character. As an incentive to perseverance, let the thought be ever present to my mind that God will impart to me strength suited to my need. If I only rely upon His almighty arm, His word is pledged to secure my eternal salvation, whatever temptations may beset me. 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.'

'To keep the lamp alive,
With oil we fill the bowl;
'Tis water makes the willow thrive,
And grace that feeds the soul.

'The Lord's unsparing hand
Supplies the living stream;
It is not at our own command,
But still derived from Him.

'Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And even an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own.'—COWPER.

XXV.

REST IN HEAVEN.

'There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God.'—HEB. IV. 9.

IT is a fact which must strike the most cursory reader of the Bible, that its descriptions of celestial bliss are chiefly negative in their character. Less prominence is given to the positive enjoyments of the redeemed than to the absence of the troubles that attended their earthly lot. The ground of this peculiarity it is not difficult to discover. The happiness of heaven so far transcends our present limited faculties, that any ideas we form of it can but dimly be illustrated by the scenes and objects with which our experience in this world renders us familiar. As earth is frequently associated in the mind of the believer with trial and sorrow, his future abode is represented as a region where these are unknown. In the passage before us, heaven is spoken of as a place of rest, provided by God for His people, and into which they enter when they have terminated their voyage on life's troubled sea.

The description which is here given of heaven as a scene of rest does not by any means convey the idea that it is a state of inactivity. Such a state, instead of constituting an element of bliss, would render the celestial world a scene of weariness and disappointment to the people of God. From other representations given by the inspired writers of future happiness, it is evident that much of this happiness will consist in the vigorous exercise of those faculties with which the redeemed shall be en-

dowed. They shall ever, with adoring wonder, contemplate the displays of the Creator's power, as exhibited in His works; they shall be unceasing in His praise; and with increasing gratitude and delight shall they trace the dealings of His providence with them during the period of their earthly sojourn. Still, while all their powers will be in active exercise, heaven will, in various respects, answer the description here given of it as a scene of rest.

It will be a rest from the toils and sufferings of earth. This world is to many a scene of sorrow, and is not inappropriately termed *a vale of tears.* From the day that the curse was denounced on our primeval parent, 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,' what a load of care and anxiety has rested on the human mind! Even when the sky is serene, and no cloud floats across it to indicate an approaching storm, it may be suddenly overcast, and a deluge of sorrow may descend, which for months and years may fill our homes with mourning and desolation. Disease may, and, alas! oftentimes does, make ravages on the body, which, after causing days and nights of racking pain, consigns it to the dust, to become the prey of worms. Often is the heart wrung with anguish, as friend after friend disappears from the ranks of society, and is laid in the narrow house appointed for all living. Frequently is the bitter tear shed by the fond parent, as he sees the child over whom he yearned forsaking the paths of virtue, and pursuing a career of vice which shall ruin his prospects both for this world and the next. Calamities such as these oftentimes enter the lot of the people of God as they pass through this world of sin; but whatever troubles assail them in time, in eternity they shall enjoy perpetual and uninterrupted peace. The vessel with which they sail the sea of mortality may encounter many a rough billow, but when it reaches the haven every storm shall subside, and not a ripple shall

appear upon the waters. The redeemed in glory shall enjoy rest from all trouble, sorrow, and affliction.

Heaven is a place of rest from sin and temptation. To the believer, whose understanding is enlightened by the influences of the Holy Spirit, sin is felt to be a burden, from which he longs to be delivered. How earnestly, for example, did the Apostle Paul desire to be freed from the bondage of corruption, and admitted to the immediate presence of Christ, where sin would cease to have dominion over him! Thus, in one place, when oppressed with the load of sin, he exclaimed, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' A more striking view of the loathsomeness of sin could not be imagined than that which is here presented. It is believed that the apostle refers to a mode of punishing criminals sometimes practised in ancient times. A dead carcase was chained to a prisoner; and as he lay day after day in his dungeon, we can picture his miserable position, and the earnestness of his petition to be separated from the putrid corpse. Similar was the feeling of Paul with regard to indwelling sin. It was an abominable thing, from which he longed to be set free. The experience of the apostle is that of all genuine believers. The more that the work of holiness advances in their character, and the closer the assimilation which they gain to the spotless image of God Himself, the more lively are their views of the evil of sin, and the more earnest is their desire to be delivered from its influence and power. While, however, they are occupants of the tabernacle of clay, they will find themselves surrounded by an atmosphere of sin, and will often be constrained to say, with the apostle, that when they would do good evil is present with them. Not only are they in danger of yielding to the dictates of their depraved nature, but spiritual enemies from without are ever eager to ensnare them and lay plots for their ruin. The world allures them by its influences,

and Satan goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour them. While members of the Church Militant, they must ever have on their spiritual armour, and stand ready for the conflict.

But in heaven the redeemed will enjoy rest, eternal rest, from sin. From the hour that they are admitted to the mansions of bliss, they are free from its influence and power. The work of sanctification, begun and carried on in time, is perfected in glory. Sin, which now alienates the affections from God, will erect no barrier between Him and the redeemed soul there. Every pulsation of the renewed nature will beat in unison with the divine will and perfections. The saints in the celestial world will be under no temptation to sin; for not only will their characters be freed from every taint of corruption, but they shall for ever be beyond the reach of the attacks of the Prince of Darkness. Angelic beings, all whose actions from the hour of their creation have been a reflection of the divine purity, will be their companions and fellow-students as they contemplate the works and ways of Providence. Viewing heaven as a region where sin is unknown, how appropriately may it be described as a place of rest to believers!

Is heaven a region of rest? Then let me bear with patience the troubles of earth, assured that, if I am indeed a child of God, these will give place at the hour of death to uninterrupted peace. This world, although much happiness is enjoyed in it, is in many respects a scene of sorrow, and oftentimes one affliction follows another, as wave succeeds wave on the tempestuous ocean. Let me, then, set my affections on those things that are above, where, freed from sin and sorrow, I shall enjoy uninterrupted bliss in the presence of the Redeemer. If the mariner, tossed for months on the billows of the deep, regards with interest the hour that shall see his vessel enter the haven, ought not I, a voyager to eternity, look forward with greater eagerness to

the period when, leaving the storms of earth behind, I shall be welcomed to the enjoyment of eternal peace?

'I would not live alway—I ask not to stay
Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way;
The few lurid mornings that dawn on us here
Are enough for life's woes, enough for its cheer.

'I would not live alway, thus fettered by sin,
Temptation without and corruption within;
E'en the rapture of pardon is mingled with fears,
And the cup of thanksgiving with penitent tears.

'I would not live alway: no, welcome the tomb!
Since Jesus hath lain there, I dread not its gloom;
There sweet be my rest, till He bid me arise,
To hail Him in triumph descending the skies.'

XXVI.

CHRIST IN HEAVEN: A SYMPATHIZING FRIEND.

'For we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'—HEB. IV. 15.

IN meditating on the glory of Christ as exhibited in the celestial world, there is one view of His character which we are apt to overlook, and that is the position which He occupies as a man. The splendours of His divine nature frequently hide His humanity from our gaze. But while Scripture teaches that Jesus reigns as God in heaven, it tells us, at the same time, that He is man, with whom all the ransomed children of Adam can claim kindred. The body that on earth was subject to hunger, thirst, and weariness, is the same body, though in a glorified form, that He possesses now. The body which Peter saw walking on the waves of the Sea of Galilee, on which John leaned when the Paschal Supper was last celebrated, and which Thomas handled that he might have his doubts removed and his faith confirmed, is the body before which they now cast their crowns and bow in lowly adoration.

While the humanity of Christ serves as a link to draw the redeemed in glory into closer fellowship with Him, it opens up to believers on earth the richest sources of encouragement. As they raise the eye of faith, and look within the veil, they can, like Stephen, see the Son of man stationed at the right hand of God, and regarding them with feelings of sympathizing love. It is said of the Rev. Robert Hall, who for many years suffered agonizing bodily

pain, that amid his affliction no theme imparted to him more solid consolation than the humanity of the Redeemer in heaven. His heart was cheered as he reflected that Jesus, whose body on earth was lacerated with pain, still wore the nature of man, and, amid all the glories of the celestial world, was able from personal experience to sympathize with him. To the believer, when oppressed with grief, what reflection is better fitted to sustain his spirits than that Jesus, who on earth was known as the Man of Sorrows, still remembers His sufferings, and is ever ready to minister to his comfort? He feels assured that his Elder Brother, though arrayed in all the glories of the divine nature, is looking down upon him with an eye of tender compassion.

Living, as the Christian does, in a world of sorrow and affliction, he frequently realizes the need of sympathy from a higher source than that of mere earthly friendship. Often his sky is overcast, and he is tossed on the billows of anguish and distress. *Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.* At no period of his life can it be said that he is beyond the reach of trial and suffering. Even from those sources out of which he draws much of his happiness, may result the causes of misery and misfortune. From the hour that our first parents lost the image of God in which they were created, unnumbered hardships and calamities have been entailed upon the race. Sorrow, disease, and death are some of the sad effects that have flowed from the rebellion of man against the laws of his Maker. Nor is the believer in Christ free from the crosses and troubles which fall to the lot of mankind in general. It is true that, by faith in the atonement wrought out for him on Calvary, he is absolved from the curse and penalty of sin; but so long as he is on this side of time, he will experience its bitter effects. In his journey through life, in his pilgrimage through earth to heaven, he has to

encounter many a danger, many a rough blast, many a sweeping tempest. His path lies not always in the smooth plains; he must at times descend the thorny valley, or climb the rugged steep.

Now, in the midst of those troubles and afflictions which fall to the lot of mankind, what influence is more powerful and soothing than the sympathy of a warm and devoted friend? It tends to allay sorrow and support the drooping spirits. The moment that the hand of love wipes the falling tear from the eye, a feeling of relief is experienced. Let a word of tenderness fall upon the ear of a believer oppressed with sorrow, and the spirit of heaviness is at once exchanged for the garments of praise.

Now, that Christ might be qualified to sympathize with His people, was one of the grand designs contemplated by Him in submitting to those sufferings which were appointed Him by the Father. It will readily be granted, that we repose more confidence in the friend who ministers to our comfort in the hour of trial if he himself has passed through sorrow and affliction. It is to such as have encountered difficulties and bereavements that we go most willingly to make known our sorrows, because we naturally expect that the recollection of their own troubles will lead them to sympathize with us when our lot becomes similar to theirs. On this principle of our nature we see how wisely it was ordered in the counsels of eternity, that He who was to act as the Captain of our salvation should, during the period of His earthly sojourn, submit to the sufferings to which humanity is liable. Having trod the same path which His people tread—having struggled with the same difficulties which they have to encounter—having passed through the same temptations which beset them, He is able from personal experience to feel for them when oppressed by the manifold ills which fall out in their earthly pilgrimage. 'Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and

blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.' Being allied to His people by the assumption of their nature—having made Himself acquainted with their sorrows, He has shown them that He will act towards them the part of a friend, and that in all their afflictions He will extend to them the sympathies of a man, while His power to bless and save them is that of Almighty God.

In those realms of bliss where the Redeemer now manifests His glory, He still bears a vivid recollection of the tears which He shed and the sufferings that He endured when, in the garb of humanity, He trode our earth. His feelings as a man are as unchangeable as His attributes as God. From the exalted throne on which He sits, from amid the songs with which seraphs are hymning His praise, He casts His eye upon our earth, beholds His people's struggles, hears their cry for help, and, on the ground of His merits and atonement, pleads with the Father that all needed blessings may be imparted to them.

From the view of the Redeemer's character now presented, let me seek to draw the comfort which it is fitted to impart. As I contemplate the glory that now surrounds His person, seated as He is upon the throne of the universe, let me remember that He is still a man, and able, from the recollection of His earthly experience, to act towards me the part of a sympathizing friend. While I am a sojourner in this world of sin, I may expect affliction to enter my lot, even when it is least expected. If the rod of chastisement is thus laid upon me, let me raise the eye of faith, and look to my Elder Brother, who retains in the mansions of bliss a fellow-feeling with His suffering saints, for the comfort which He is able and willing to impart. Should poverty lay its pinching hand upon me, let me rest assured that He, who on earth had not where to lay His head, will from His throne in bliss look down in sympathy upon me. If my heart should be wrung with grief, let me seek comfort

from the Redeemer, who, amid the exalted glory that now encircles Him, remembers that, in the days of His humiliation, He was known as the Man of Sorrows. When the hour of death comes, let my earnest prayer be, that He, as the Captain of Salvation, may lead me in safety through the dark valley to that blissful world where the tear of sorrow is wiped from every eye. Thus, confiding in His friendship, I shall realize more of His worth, and be in some measure fitted for the holy fellowship which is enjoyed with Him in His immediate presence.

'Abide with me, my Saviour!
In deep affliction's hour;
Come then with all Thy tender love,
And all Thy mighty power,
And whisper, amid doubt and fear,
Sweet words my spirit loves to hear.

'Abide with me, my Saviour!
In the dread hour of death;
Let Thy dear arms be round me then,
When yielding up my breath.
My Saviour! I can know no fear,
If once I feel that Thou art near.'

XXVII.

THE EARTHLY CANAAN A TYPE OF THE HEAVENLY.

'For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you; and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein.' —DEUT. XI. 31.

IN any journey undertaken for an important object, the termination is uniformly looked forward to with eagerness. More especially is this the case when the way through which that journey is pursued is long and tedious. For the space of forty years the children of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness. During that time they had been surrounded by many dangers, and subjected to many hardships. Constantly they were beset by enemies, who were eager to harass and oppress them; while frequently murmurings and discontent arose among them because of the privations to which they were exposed. How great, then, must have been the joy of the Israelites when the period of their journeyings was about to terminate, and the near prospect opened up before them of entering that land which their forefathers in bygone ages had trod! Not greater is the delight which fills the bosom of the mariner, who on stormy seas has long been separated from kindred and home, when the ship in which he sails nears his native clime, than was the happiness that must have thrilled the hearts of God's chosen people when the perils of the wilderness were all left behind, and Jordan, which separated them from the land of promise, appeared in view.

At the time when Moses, the leader of Israel, uttered

the words which form the theme of the present meditation, he was far advanced in life. He had led his countrymen through the toils and dangers of the wilderness, and had thus accomplished the work to which God had appointed him. He knew that in a short time his earthly life should terminate, and he spent its closing period in a manner worthy of him. In consequence of his disobedience to the express command of Jehovah, he only obtained a distant view of Canaan, and was not to be permitted to enter it. He was therefore eager to use the utmost diligence in preparing the people of his charge for the new abode that awaited them. The sun, when he sets in a western sky, often presents a variety of tinge which adds to his ordinary beauty and magnificence. So this distinguished servant of the Almighty, when his career on earth was about to terminate, manifested a zeal in the cause of his great Master which reflects a halo of glory on his character. He tells the Israelites that their journeyings are near a close, and that in a short time they shall cross the Jordan, to inhabit the fertile land which had long been the object of their hopes. After rehearsing those laws which God had prescribed for the regulation of their conduct, he makes the cheering announcement, 'For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you; and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein.'

Centuries before this sentiment was uttered by the Jewish lawgiver, God had promised to Abraham that the land of Canaan should be given to his posterity. 'To thee will I give this land, and thy seed after thee.' That promise had often been repeated to his descendants. The prospect of inheriting this land cheered and comforted the Israelites in every season of difficulty. While they groaned in Egypt, while they endured the hardships of the wilderness, when they were attacked by enemies, the thought that they should one day plant their feet on the promised Canaan sustained

their spirits, often ready to droop, made them bear with patience the trials of their lot, and nerved them for the severest conflicts.

The beauty and fertility of the land of Canaan were worthy of the brightest hopes of God's ancient people. It was 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' or, as Moses otherwise describes it, 'a good land; a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil, olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness; thou shalt not lack anything in it.' In beauty of scenery and fertility of soil, Canaan could stand comparison with any other country. It was emphatically termed 'the garden of the Lord, the glory of all lands.' All that could delight the eye was lavished on its surface. Every form and variety of landscape was exhibited to the view. Lebanon, with its stately cedars; the mountains of Tabor, Hermon, and Carmel; and the waters of Galilee, were all objects of surpassing magnificence, and on which the lover of nature might gaze with ecstasy and rapture.

Like the children of Israel, all God's people are journeying to another and better country; and that country is heaven, of which the earthly land of Canaan was but a faint type. They are now in a wilderness, surrounded with innumerable cares, temptations, and sorrows, but they look for *a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.* As the prospect of entering Canaan supported the fainting hearts of the Israelites when they traversed the bleak and sandy desert, so the hope of enjoying the everlasting bliss of heaven cheers and sustains the Christian as he pursues his journey thither. Here he is in an enemy's country—he is constantly liable to be attacked by the great adversary of souls; but no temptation shall ever lure him from the path of holiness in the paradise above. Here he can only

obtain a glimpse of the Redeemer with the eye of faith; there He shall see Him as He is, invested with all the glories of divinity, and seated on His mediatorial throne. Here he is frequently exposed to calumny, contempt, and suffering; but there he shall wear a crown of unfading lustre, and take his place among the wise and good of all times. Here he has to mourn the hidings of his Father's countenance; but in heaven his sun shall no more go down, and that countenance shall be ever towards him, radiant with love and joy. Here he laments his many shortcomings, he sheds tears of bitterness over the power of indwelling corruption; but in the celestial Canaan no taint of sin shall lurk within his soul, for his character, in all its parts, shall be reflected from the character of Him who is the infinite source of purity. Having washed his robes in the blood of the Lamb, he shall walk with Him in white.

Such is a faint picture of the glory of heaven; but in our present state we are altogether unable to estimate the full amount of its happiness. Even the page of inspiration affords but faint glimpses of its surpassing bliss. One who had been caught up to the third heaven, and permitted to look upon its glories, could only say respecting them, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.'

With regard to this anticipated inheritance, it is bestowed as the result of free and unmerited grace,—*the land which the Lord your God giveth you.* The Israelites possessed no title to Canaan. It was not a country, after journeying to which through innumerable dangers, they should purchase with silver or gold; it was a gift to be conferred by the favour of the Almighty. So is it with heaven, the future abode of believers. In themselves they have no title to those mansions of bliss which in Scripture are promised

to them. By nature, indeed, they are heirs of perdition instead of being heirs of glory. But God, on the ground of Christ's righteousness, has removed the curse which rested on them, and gives them a title to the eternal joys of heaven. When the Christian plants his feet on the celestial Canaan, mingles in its holy society, holds converse with the Saviour whom he loves, engages in those studies which will enlarge his knowledge of the Creator's character and works, and contrasts all the happiness he there possesses with the sorrow and suffering which on earth he oftentimes experienced,—instead of looking to any works of his own as having entitled him to those joys which surround him, he shall regard Christ as the source whence they all have come; while, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, and in loud and loving strains, he shall ascribe songs of praise to His name.

Certain though the possession of heaven is to the believer, death must be encountered before its glories are realized: 'Ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you.' Jordan was, in one important respect, typical of death; between it and man's last enemy there is a striking point of resemblance. Jordan required to be passed through by the Israelites in their journey to the land of promise; so death must be experienced by every saint in his passage from earth to the celestial world. We read in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, that when Christian and Hopeful, at the termination of their pilgrimage, came to the river of Death, they found, on inquiry at the angelic beings who stood upon its banks, that it was only by crossing that river they could reach the gate of the celestial city. Every saint in Christ Jesus, however great may be his attainments in the divine life, however bright may be the graces which adorn his character, however strong may be the faith which he exercises in the merit of his Redeemer, must submit to a struggle, more

or less severe, with the last enemy. *It is appointed unto men once to die,* and that appointment even the believer cannot evade. Jordan lies between him and heaven, and that Jordan he must cross.

While death is to the unconverted *the king of terrors,* and may justly be viewed by them with feelings of alarm, the Christian need not fear as he goes down into the dark valley. When the Israelites reached the Jordan, God divided its waters, so that they passed through on dry ground. The priests, we are informed, stood in the bed of the river till all the people crossed over in safety. So, in like manner, does the Almighty open up a path for all His believing children in their passage from time to eternity. Jesus, the Captain of Salvation, does not forsake them in the midst of their last conflict; He is with them amid the swellings of Jordan; He conducts them in peace to the celestial shore, where they are welcomed by angelic spirits, and conveyed by them to the mansions of bliss that have been purchased and prepared for them.

Am I a pilgrim to the celestial Canaan? Then let me act worthy of the exalted hopes which I cherish. If heaven is to be my eternal abode, let me strive to set my affections upon it. In view of the glorious prospects which stretch out before me, let me bear up under the afflictions of the present life. If I place myself under the guidance of the Captain of Salvation, He will vouchsafe many tokens of His favour to cheer me on my way; He will impart to me glimpses of my future abode, that I may be stimulated to pursue my course with increased ardour. As a weary traveller, when he reaches the summit of a hill, is nerved for his journey by catching a distant view of his home, so will I be cheered in my Christian pilgrimage as I ascend the watch-tower of faith, and behold from afar the splendours of my heavenly inheritance. Shadowed by the pillar of cloud by day, and guided by the pillar of fire by night, I

shall press in safety on till I stand on the brink of the Jordan of death, which separates the perils of the wilderness from the joys of my eternal rest. As I cross the chilling stream, He who has promised, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' will be by my side. He will conduct me in peace to the celestial shore, where, with the storms of earth all left behind, I shall bask in the sunshine of eternal love.

'Surely yon heaven, where angels see God's face,
Is not so distant as we deem
From this low earth! 'Tis but a little space,
The narrow crossing of a slender stream;
'Tis but a veil, which winds might blow aside:
Yes, these are all that us of earth divide
From the bright dwelling of the glorified,
The land of which I dream!

'This life of ours, these lingering years of earth,
Are briefer, swifter than they seem;
A little while, and the great second birth
Of time shall come, the prophet's ancient theme.
Then He, the King, the Judge, at length shall come,
And for this desert, where we sadly roam,
Shall give the kingdom for our endless home,
The land of which I dream!'—BONAR.

XXVIII.

THE EXAMPLE OF DEPARTED SAINTS.

'That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.'—HEB. VI. 12.

TRUE is the maxim that men are influenced by example more than by precept. When we see a pattern of moral excellence, we are more disposed to imitate such a pattern than to discharge a prescribed duty, however earnestly it may be inculcated. While abstract reasoning and solemn counsel are too often allowed to fall pointless on the ear, a pure and virtuous example seldom fails to arrest attention and produce a salutary impression on the mind of the beholder. Hence it is that God, who knows the tendency of the human mind to imitate the traits of character that pass before the eye, has placed before us in His word the holy deeds of many of His people, that by the contemplation of them we may be led to tread in their footsteps, and like them obtain, at the termination of life, a glorious reward. The most cursory reader of the Bible must be impressed with the fact, that a large portion of it is occupied with the biographies of individuals who in their day were distinguished patterns of holiness, love, zeal, and every grace that adorns the character of believers. From the righteous Abel, who presented a sacrifice that gained the approbation of Heaven, down to the seraphic John, who, a solitary exile on Patmos, saw visions of celestial glory, the recital of which has gladdened the hearts of God's people ever since, what a galaxy of eminent saints passes

the earnest of the blessings which they now enjoy. What the first note of the music is to the full swell of the chorus, what the early dawn is to the splendour of noon-day, what the bud is to the flower,—these promises were the foretaste of the happiness which they enjoy at God's right hand.

The promises, which were like guiding-stars to the saints in their earthly pilgrimage, pointing their eye forward to things unseen and eternal, have now been realized in their experience. Did these promises assure them of an entrance into heaven as their everlasting home? They have entered that world of bliss, and now share in its enjoyments. Did these promises tell them that after death they should be freed from sin and perfected in holiness? They have left behind every remainder of corruption, and their character reflects the spotless purity of the divine nature. Did these promises inspire them with the hope that in eternity they should be strangers to sorrow and affliction? God has wiped away all tears from their eyes, and they drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at His right hand. Did these promises speak of the unveiled glory of Christ, which they should behold in heaven? Now they see Him as He is, and their fellowship with Him is close and intimate. Did these promises assure believers that they should be admitted to converse with distinguished saints of every age and clime? They have sat down with many who have come from the east and west; patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, missionaries and their converts, are their companions, and unite with them in ascribing praise to the name of the Redeemer.

The instrumental means by which glorified saints came to inherit the promises are specified by the apostle as *faith and patience.* It was by the exercise of faith—faith in Christ's atoning work—that they came to obtain admission to the mansions of glory that had been provided

for them. By nature they were children of wrath, even as others; on account of sin they were heirs of perdition, and had no claims on the ground of any merit of their own to the possession of the heavenly inheritance. Christ, however, died not only to ransom them from guilt, but to purchase for them a title to eternal life. They realized the value of Christ's atonement, and fled to Him for mercy. They saw themselves sinners, and sought salvation by His blood. They exercised faith in Him, whereby they obtained possession of God's love on earth, and at the hour of death admission to the joys of His presence. With the glass of faith they were enabled to see a reality in divine and spiritual things, which led them to estimate the vanities and pursuits of earth at their true value. Possessed of faith, they overcame the world, triumphed over their spiritual enemies, and gained the prize of eternal life.

Patience is the other grace which enabled departed saints to obtain the inheritance of the promises. This is a grace which must frequently be exercised by the believer in his pilgrimage through time to eternity. Sometimes he is called to endure affliction, and he must submit with calmness to the appointments of his Heavenly Father. He may have to encounter the obloquy and scorn of the world; and he must, like his great Exemplar, exhibit meekness under the infliction of wrong. Perhaps he has to wait long for the fulfilment of the promises, but he must not murmur or repine. His patience, however, will at length be rewarded. Heaven is the blessed recompense of a life devoted to the divine will.

As I contemplate the exalted position now occupied by departed saints, let my fervent desire be that I may tread in their footsteps, and, like them, enter at the hour of death on the inheritance of the promises. As I contemplate their character, let me seek conformity to it. As they, while on earth, centred their faith on Christ, so may I build all my

hopes of salvation on His merit. As they battled successfully against all the temptations of their earthly lot, so let me gird on my spiritual armour, that I may like them come off victorious. As they, while pilgrims in this lower world, set their affections on things above, so let me make heaven the theme of my meditation and the object of my hope. As they exhibited patience and resignation under the afflictions of Divine Providence that befell them, so let me endeavour to bow with submission to all the appointments of my Heavenly Father. The closer the resemblance that I bear to their character on earth, the fitter shall I be for being admitted to their society in heaven.

'Awake, my soul! stretch every nerve,
And press with vigour on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal,
And an immortal crown.

'A cloud of witnesses around
Holds thee in full survey;
Forget the steps already trod,
And onward urge thy way.

'The joys and pleasures of a day
I cheerfully resign,
Rich in the large immortal store,
Secured by grace divine.'—DODDRIDGE.

XXIX.

FAITH AND SIGHT.

'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'—1 PET. I. 8.

THE life of the Christian during his earthly sojourn is emphatically a life of faith. *He walks by faith, as seeing Him who is invisible.* All his hopes centre on the Redeemer, whom he has never beheld with the bodily eye. Thus the apostle, addressing believers, tells them that they love a Friend whom they have not seen. Although, however, they have not discoursed with Christ, as did His disciples in the days of His flesh, they have the clearest and most satisfactory evidence that the facts recorded of Him in the Gospels actually transpired. The parties to whom these words were originally addressed were strangers scattered abroad; they had not lived in Judea, and conversed with the Redeemer, or seen His miracles of power, but had been led to believe on Him through the testimony of the eye-witnesses of His life. They saw in the blameless character of the apostles that they were worthy of credit; that in the works of wonder which they wrought they possessed the favour of Heaven; that in the purity of the precepts they inculcated, and the sublimity of the doctrines they unfolded, the religion which they propagated had a higher than earthly origin. They thus credited all the statements which they made regarding the Redeemer's life, miracles, and death.

The faith that characterized these early followers of Christ was the same that is possessed by His disciples in every age. Just as, underneath the diversified rocks that lie embedded in the bowels of the earth, there are ever found the solid basalt and granite, so, amid the conventionalities of clime and era, the faith that distinguishes believers, and which is the root of all their Christian experience, is ever found the same. Though many centuries have elapsed since Christ lived in our world, Christians have the clearest and most convincing evidence that the events recorded in the Gospels actually transpired. No individual now living ever saw the Saviour; but that is no reason why we should doubt His existence. A man who has never seen India or Japan believes that there are such countries in the world, because others have visited and described them. A merchant will embark with his cargo for some distant port although he has never seen it, because he credits the account of mariners who have at different times sailed to it. So Christians, though they have never seen the Saviour with the bodily eye, believe on Him through the testimony of the eye-witnesses of His life. In the Gospels His history is related, His character delineated, and His death recorded by men who frequently conversed with Him, who accompanied Him in His journeys, who saw His miracles, and who could not therefore be deceived as to the facts which they narrate. Then there are the strongest reasons for believing that they were candid and sincere historians, and testified only what they had seen and heard. Obloquy and scorn, stripes, imprisonment, and death, were the only earthly reward which they could expect for their advocacy of the cause of Christ. Were an infidel of the present day to deny that such a person as Jesus of Nazareth lived in our world, he might, with much greater reason, discredit the existence of such men as Alexander and Socrates, Cæsar or Cicero; and consistency

would require that he should consign all history to the region of fable and romance.

So triumphant is the evidence of the truth of the facts recorded in the gospel narrative, that Christians of the present day are as firmly convinced of it as if they had trod with the Redeemer the streets of Jerusalem, sailed with Him on the Sea of Galilee, seen Him raise Lazarus from the tomb, prayed with Him in Gethsemane's garden, or listened to the accents of His voice on the Mount of Olives. Nor do they merely credit the account of His earthly history; they believe that He is now in heaven, dispensing the blessings which He died to procure. They feel that they are sinners, but by looking to Him they obtain pardon. They know that on account of sin they are heirs of wrath, but through the merit of His blood they become heirs of glory. Though He is unseen by mortal eye, they entrust their never-dying souls into His hands, assured that there they are safe for eternity.

The language of the apostle implies that though believers do not now see the Saviour, a time is coming when they shall see Him; and the blissful prospect is represented as awakening in their hearts a joy unspeakable and full of glory. The hope of seeing that Friend whom on earth they tenderly loved, whose character they admired, and to whom they looked as the Author of their exalted privileges, is a source of felicity compared with which all the pleasures of the world are as dust in the balance. It was this that kindled the enthusiasm of the Apostle Paul, in the midst of his labours and sufferings for the furtherance of the Christian cause, and as he looked forward to the hour of his entrance into glory. Tossed on the stormy ocean of time, the thought that, when he reached the port of eternal peace, he should gaze on the countenance of that Redeemer whose grace had arrested him in his career as a persecutor, and converted him into an advocate of the truth, was the

main element in the eternal weight of glory which he placed in contrast with the light afflictions of earth. The prospect of being ever with the Lord was to him the sum and substance of celestial bliss. His experience is that of every genuine saint. To the candidate for immortal felicity, the hope of seeing the Redeemer face to face—His head not now encircled with thorns, but wearing many crowns—not now the despised Nazarene, but the object of adoration to the myriads of glorified ones who surround the eternal throne—awakens a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

If the hope of meeting with the Redeemer face to face is a spring of joy in the heart of the believer, what must the reality be, when earth is left behind and he enters the portals of eternal bliss? Multitudes of angels hail his appearance in their midst; glorified saints, with palms of victory in their hands, lead him along the banks of the river of life. Faith has now given place to sight; the scenes of eternity have burst upon his view; and as he walks the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, feelings of rapture fill his soul. But what will be his joy when he stands in the immediate presence of Emmanuel, who shall place on his head the diadem of unfading glory! As he gazes on His countenance, every feature of which will bear the impression of that unparalleled love which constrained Him to purchase the salvation of a lost world by the sacrifice of His precious life; as he hears the gentle accents of His voice welcoming him to the mansions of bliss which have been prepared for his reception; and as he reflects that through eternity he will ever possess the privilege of holding intimate communion with Him, what transports of joy will fill his mind!

With the blissful prospect, if I am a genuine follower of Christ, of seeing Him face to face, and enjoying immediate fellowship with Him, let me seek to cultivate strong faith in Him, that I may possess an unclouded assurance of coming bliss. I do not now see the Saviour, but His life

is portrayed in His word, which I have reason to believe is a book divinely inspired. Let me study His character, and let it be my fervent desire not only that I may admire it, but that its features may appear in my conduct, that thus I may be fitted for fellowship with Him in the world of glory. The closer the resemblance that I bear to Him, and the more ardent the love that I cherish to Him, the nearer will be my position to Him on His majestic throne. Blessed Redeemer! increase my faith in Thy sacrifice; impart to me an enlarged view of the glories of Thy character; work in me by Thy Spirit a growing assimilation to Thy spotless image, that thus I may be fitted for seeing Thee as Thou art, and dwelling for ever in Thy immediate presence.

'Where Jesus dwells my soul would be,
It faints my much-loved Lord to see;
Earth, twine no more around my heart,
For oh, 'twere better to depart.

'Come, ye angelic envoys! come,
And lead the willing pilgrim home;
Ye know the way to that bright throne,
Source of my joys and of your own.

'That blessed interview! how sweet
To fall transported at His feet;
Raised in His arms, to view His face
Through the full beamings of His grace!'

DODDRIDGE.

XXX.

THE HEAVENLY INTERCESSOR.

'I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.'—JOHN XVII. 15.

THE love which Christ bore to His disciples is nowhere more beautifully portrayed than in the prayer that He presented to His Father in their behalf, at the time immediately preceding His sufferings and death. From the hour that He began His public ministry, He had bestowed upon them the most tender care,—removing from their minds the false notions which, in their ignorance, they had entertained respecting His character; training them for the high and important work of preaching His gospel in the world; and comforting them with the assurance of His blessing and protection when, after His departure from them, they should be exposed to danger and persecution. Nor did Christ's love for His disciples in any degree abate as He drew near the close of His life; the same tender concern for their welfare still characterized all His dealings towards them. It might have been expected, that as He was encircled by the dark shadow which was already reflected from Golgotha, the prospect of His own sufferings would absorb the whole of His attention. But instead of concentrating His thoughts on His own position and the ignominy that awaited Him, He, as it were, seemed unmindful of Himself till He had committed His little flock to the care of His Heavenly Father. In a few hours He was to endure the scorn and buffetings of wicked men, experience the bitter pangs of crucifixion, and submit to

the dismal hidings of His Father's countenance; yet, with the gloomy prospect of His sufferings before His eyes, He poured out His soul in behalf of those who, while others rejected and despised Him, had continued His faithful and constant attendants during His ministry.

We have the testimony of the word of God for believing that Jesus still cherishes the same love for His people that He manifested for His first followers: 'He ever liveth to make intercession for us.' Though He is now seated on a throne of majesty, invested with all the glories of the heavenly world, He ceases not to bend an eye of compassion on all His loving and believing children. Angels, whose number is ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, celebrate His praise; but amid all the hosannahs that are wafted to His name, He feels a tender concern for the welfare of those who, in the midst of a wicked world, avow themselves His friends. He who prayed for His followers when about to endure the agony of Gethsemane, and whose character was an embodiment of mercy when His head was encircled with thorns, still intercedes for the family of the redeemed now that He wears a diadem of unfading glory.

Were it not for the account which the evangelist has given in this chapter of the prayer which Christ offered for His disciples, we might have been at a loss to form a definite idea of the intercessory work in which He is now engaged in heaven. The petitions there recorded, however, are to be regarded as types of the prayers which He is now presenting at the right hand of His Father in behalf of His people. The mysterious folds of the veil which hides the mercy-seat from the view of mortals is, as it were, here drawn aside, and we behold the Redeemer on His mediatorial throne, pleading for His chosen ones, who are exposed to the troubles and temptations of earth. Let us with reverence draw near and view this great sight,

and as we listen to Emmanuel's voice praying for His people, let the desire fill our hearts that we may have an interest in His petitions.

In Christ's intercessory prayer there is a variety of petitions, all of which exhibit the love and sympathy which He felt and still cherishes for His people. The portion of the prayer which we are now to consider is, *I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.* Though the disciples were to be exposed to danger and persecution, He did not pray that they might be released from these, and at once translated to glory, but, for wise reasons, it was His wish that they might continue a little longer amid the trials and temptations of the present life.

One of the grounds on which Jesus presented this prayer was, that the apostles were required to propagate His gospel in the world. Had they ascended with Him to glory, and at once entered on their reward, the grand and important truths connected with man's redemption could not have become known, and thus the design of Christ, that salvation through His name should be proclaimed among all nations, would not have been accomplished. When He began His public ministry, He selected a band of followers, and trained them for going into all the world to preach His gospel to every creature. Hence the purport of the petition, *I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.* Though it was the wish of Jesus that they should dwell for ever with Him in glory, still they had a part of His work to perform before they quitted their earthly tabernacle to enter on the mansions of bliss He should prepare for them. The gospel of their Master was to be propagated in every region of the world; souls were to be raised from the deadness of sin and made the trophies of redeeming grace; beginning at Jerusalem, churches were to be planted throughout the length and breadth of Palestine and the surrounding countries before they exchanged the labours

and trials of earth for the rewards and hosannahs of heaven.

Jesus is now engaged in the work of intercession in the celestial world, and we may regard Him as still presenting this petition,—'*I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world*,'—in behalf of His people, for the same reason that led Him to offer it for His first disciples. It might be thought that the saint, as soon as He has passed from a state of sin to a state of grace, should be freed from the bondage of corruption, and at once translated to glory. But Christ has work for His people to accomplish on the earth before they enter on His service in another and more exalted state of being. To believers is entrusted the high commission of making known the truths of salvation to those who, sunk in ignorance and vice, are living in a total disregard of their interests for eternity. The Christian, being redeemed by the blood of the cross, is no longer his own, but is bound to consecrate all the powers of his nature to extend the cause of religion in the world. Why, at the hour of his spiritual birth, was he not translated from the sin and suffering of earth to the holiness and felicity of heaven? His existence is prolonged in the world that he may make known to his fellow-men tidings of salvation through the name of his Redeemer. We may regard the great High Priest of His people as interceding thus with His Father on their behalf:—'*I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world* till they have laboured a little in my vineyard, and put forth efforts to make known the truths of my gospel. *I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world* till, by their instrumentality, some wandering sinners are brought to see the error of their ways and admitted to my fold. *I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world* till they have exemplified the principles which my grace has implanted in their souls, that thus they may be my witnesses on the earth; and that

others, seeing their holy and heavenly disposition, may be led to tread in their footsteps, and thus add to the great company of the redeemed, upon whom, as the purchase of my sufferings, I shall gaze with rapture when time shall be no more.'

Another ground on which we may regard Jesus as presenting this prayer for His people is, that they may be gradually ripened for the service, the bliss, and the rewards of heaven. Though it was the wish of Jesus that His apostles should continue on earth after He Himself had ascended to glory, He also desired that they might pass through a course of discipline, which would fit them for enjoying His immediate fellowship in the mansions of glory. In executing the high commission which had been entrusted to them, they were to be exposed to many dangers from their profession of attachment to their Master and His cause. To whatever quarter of the globe they bent their steps, the wrath and malice of wicked men were directed against their efforts. While, in the ardour of their love, they were unfolding the truths of salvation to their fellow-men, and inviting them to comply with the offer of rich and unbounded mercy, their characters were maligned, and their actions were regarded with hatred and suspicion. In the prosecution of their benign enterprise, they were exposed to all the cruelties which their persecutors could devise, and, with one exception, had to seal their testimony with their blood. Yet, though the eye of the merciful Jesus foresaw the sufferings which awaited them in their future career, His prayer for them was, *I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.* It is as if He had said: 'Not till the principles of grace in their souls are ripe for full development in the heavenly world is it my wish that these my disciples be freed from the labours and trials of earth. I *pray* not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world to be delivered from

the persecutions of wicked men, for these are overruled for their spiritual good; by these their affections are deadened to time and time's things, and they are thus led to centre their desires and aspirations on regions of unblemished purity and unfading bliss.'

Christ, as He intercedes with His Father, is still presenting this prayer in behalf of His people for the same reason, —*I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.* Sometimes, indeed, believers are put in possession of their destined rest shortly after the Holy Spirit has wrought in them a regenerating change; but more frequently they have to pass through years of difficulty and temptation before the messenger of death summons them to their everlasting reward. When the Israelites were freed from the bondage and pursuit of the Egyptians, they were not immediately admitted to Canaan, but had to wander for the space of forty years in the midst of a bleak and barren wilderness. The march from the Red Sea to Palestine could have been accomplished with ease in the course of a few weeks; why were they not sooner released from the toils and fatigues of their tedious journey, and made to enter that land which for ages had been promised to their nation? In this, as in all the other dealings of the Almighty, He acted with infinite wisdom. New light respecting the divine character required to be shed upon their minds—a stronger feeling of dependence on their great Deliverer for help and guidance had to be cherished—their proneness to idolatry and their hardness of heart needed to be checked and subdued, before they were fitted and prepared for the rest to be provided for them.

Experience goes to prove that God frequently exercises the same treatment towards His people still. They have trials to undergo, temptations to overcome, lusts to restrain, and evil desires to quench, before their souls are freed from their bodily tenement to soar to the regions of eternal

peace. It is true that, in many cases, the young are translated to glory without having to undergo the dangers and difficulties that attend the divine life. But more exalted will be the position of those who glorify Christ by a long life of holy and consistent conduct. They who have cultivated a spirit of resignation amid the afflictive dispensations of Providence towards them, and who, as the result of trials, crosses, and bereavements, have been drawn nearer to God and fitted for more intimate fellowship with Him, shall have a distinguished place assigned them among the ranks of the redeemed.

Am I a ransomed child of God? Then the Redeemer is interceding for me, and praying that, while I am an occupant of this world, I may fulfil the grand ends contemplated by my creation. One of these ends is, that I seek to advance the glory of the Redeemer. Let me endeavour so to live that the prayer of the great High Priest may be answered in my experience. As I pursue my course to the celestial world, may I be ready to embrace every opportunity that presents itself of pressing the offer of redemption on my fellow-men. Thus, at the termination of life, I shall have the satisfaction of believing that I have not passed through the world in vain. When I appear before Christ as my Judge, He shall acknowledge His prayer in my behalf answered, as I shall have been an instrument, however unworthy, of advancing His glory in the salvation of my fellow-men.

My existence is continued in the world also that I may grow in fitness for the services and enjoyments of heaven. I am now in the spring-time of my being; *as I sow, so shall I reap.* Let my earnest prayer and effort be, that as I advance in days and years, I may also advance in ripeness for eternal bliss. This is one object for which Christ now intercedes in my behalf. He pleads with the Father that grace may be given me to increase in holiness, that thus

I may be gradually conformed to His own pure image. Almighty Redeemer! may the discipline through which Thou dost call me to pass be instrumental, in the hand of Thy Spirit, in preparing me for the immediate fellowship with Thee to which Thy saints at the hour of death are admitted!

'Not out of the world, dear Father,
With duties and vows unfulfilled,
With life's earnest labours unfinished,
Ambition and passion unstill'd.

'Not out of the world, dear Father,
Until we have faithfully tried
To burnish the talent Thou gavest,
And gain other talents beside.

'Not out of the world, dear Father,
Till, bowed with humility down,
The weight of the cross is forgotten
In the golden light of the crown.'

XXXI.

THE HOUSE ETERNAL.

'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'—2 COR. V. 1.

HOW striking is the contrast which these words exhibit between the present and future condition of the believer! Now he dwells in a perishable tabernacle; hereafter he shall occupy a house eternal in the heavens. The body of man, exhibiting though it does so many proofs of the divine wisdom, is composed of the dust on which we tread. Apart from the testimony which Scripture furnishes on the point, a chemical analysis of its various parts shows that earth enters very largely into its formation. While, with reference to the spiritual portion of our nature, we are made but a little lower than the angels, still, as regards the structure of our corporeal frame, we are on a level with the inferior animals: 'Our foundation is in the dust, and we dwell in houses of clay.'

The body of man, composed of the dust of the ground, is frail and perishable in its nature. The apostle here describes it as *our earthly house of this tabernacle.* A tent or tabernacle is usually made of fragile materials, and is intended only as a place of temporary residence. Sometimes it is erected one day and taken down the next, and, from the slightness of its contexture, is incapable of being a permanent habitation. It affords but a faint protection from the storm or hurricane that would sweep innocuously over a dwelling strongly built and resting on a firm founda-

tion; and oftentimes it is laid prostrate by the elements, so that the weary traveller who has taken refuge under it finds himself shelterless and bare. One who travelled in the East, and saw illustrations of tent-life, thus describes it: 'The tents seldom remain long in the same place. The traveller erects his temporary abode for the night, takes it down in the morning, and journeys onward. The shepherds of the country are also always moving from one place to another. The brook fails on which they relied for water, or the grass required for the support of their flocks is consumed, and they wander on to a new station.'

Who, that reflects on the frail and perishable nature of the human body, does not see the appropriateness of the comparison between it and the tent as now described? So liable is it to decay, that a breath of wind suddenly checking perspiration may lay the foundation of a malady which, in the course of a few weeks or months, may consign it to the tomb. Some unforeseen accident may in a moment paralyze its functions, and leave it, as a habitation of the soul, tenantless. And at the longest, so short is the period during which it is occupied by the spiritual part of man, that the inspired writers compare it to the grass of the field, which in the morning is fresh and green, but in the evening is cut down by the mower; to the flower, beautiful with its varied colours one day, but withered and rotting the next; to the shadow, which fleeth and continueth not.

The body, frail and perishable in its nature, is at last dissolved. Death severs the connection between it and the soul, when it at once becomes the prey of corruption. While the spirit returns to the God who gave it, the dust returns to the earth as it was. Then the corporeal frame, which was united to the soul by a tie which the last enemy could alone snap asunder, moulders and decays, and becomes assimilated to the earth in which it is deposited. Once full of vigour and activity, and serving as an avenue

to convey knowledge and happiness to the mind, its functions have all ceased to be in exercise, and its parts furnish food to the worms of the dust. While the busy world is occupied with ten thousand plans,—bargaining or getting gain, marrying or giving in marriage, devising or carrying out schemes of conquest,—the body lies in the lone churchyard, or, it may be, in regions remote from home and kindred, till the morning of the resurrection.

Contrasted with the frail tabernacle of the body, is the durability of the habitation into which the believer enters at the hour of death. He is admitted to 'a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' The prominent idea suggested by the varied expressions here employed by the apostle to describe the character of the heavenly world is its permanence. On earth, every object on which we look exhibits indications of change. Like the kaleidoscope, the material world presents to the eye an ever-varying scene and new phases and combinations. Geology reveals the mighty transformation that has taken place in the structure of the rocks that lie embedded beneath the earth's surface. And if we look to the works reared by art and man's device, we will find them equally affected by the corroding influence of time. Palaces and cities, which were objects of admiration to past generations, have crumbled into dust. Nineveh, whose architecture was executed with all the wealth which its proud monarchs could command; Babylon, whose towers and fortifications filled surrounding nations with awe and wonder; Tyre, whose vessels, laden with merchandise, carried commerce to regions far and wide, have all passed away like a dream of the night, and only among their rubbish can traces of their former grandeur be discovered. Man himself is subject to constant mutation. He comes into the world a helpless infant; his faculties expand and gather strength; but at length his bodily and mental powers show symptoms of

decay, and at last the hand of death removes him from the stage of life.

Contrasted with the decaying nature of all things earthly, what value does the permanence of the house 'not made with hands' stamp on its felicity! The building 'eternal in the heavens' will be worthy of its divine Architect. No cloud shall ever darken its horizon; no calamity shall befall its inhabitants; death shall be unknown among them, and immortality shall be the law of their being. The harps with which they shall celebrate Jehovah's praise will ever be in tune; their crowns will be ever radiant, with splendour reflected from the eternal throne; their robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb, will be ever white; and their palms, emblems of the triumphs over sin and Satan which they achieved, will be ever green. While the sun, moon, and stars may be blotted from the map of creation, and while our earth will be dissolved, the house not made with hands will experience no change, except from one degree of bliss to another.

As I contemplate the faith of the apostle, which led him to pen the words, 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,' let it be my earnest prayer that I may possess the same faith, that, like him, I may be animated by the same unclouded hope. How often are my views of the celestial world bedimmed by the shades of doubt and unbelief! No veil of uncertainty hung between Paul's vision and the glories of eternity. He does not say we hope or trust, but emphatically, *we know that we have a building of God.* And what but the strong faith of the apostle enabled him to employ language expressive of such firm assurance of future bliss? Let me, then, like him, take my station by the cross of Calvary, and relying on the merit of the blood that was shed upon it, cherish the sure hope of eternal glory. Possessed

of such hope, what peace and serenity will fill my mind amid the trials and temptations of my earthly lot! My body, I know, will become the prey of death, and moulder in the dust; but the soul, united by faith to the Redeemer, will enter upon bliss not only pure and perfect in its nature, but eternal in its duration.

'Beyond the dark and stormy bound
That guards our dull horizon round,
A lovelier landscape swells;
Resplendent seat of light and peace,
In thee the sounds of conflict cease,
And glory ever dwells.

'For thee the early patriarch sighed,
Thy distant beauty faint descried,
And hailed the blest abode;
A stranger here, he sought a home
Fixed in a city yet to come,
The City of his God.

'We too, O Lord, would seek that land,
Follow the tribes that crowd its strand,
From every peril saved;
And wake, as when in elder time
Were marshalled all Thy hosts sublime,
And high Thy banner waved.'

XXXII.

AFFLICTION—A PREPARATION FOR GLORY.

'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'—2 COR. IV. 17.

TWO objects are here placed in contrast by the apostle; the one is the light affliction of the believer, and the other is the exceeding and eternal weight of glory for which that affliction prepares him. In reflecting on this sentiment, the first idea that suggests itself is the estimate which Paul formed of the trials and troubles of earth. He speaks of his affliction as *light*, and yet, when we read his history as related in the Acts of the Apostles, it looks like one continued round of privation and difficulty. From the hour that Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and marked him out as a trophy of His grace, his life, to human view, was a protracted struggle with hardship and persecution. Oftentimes was he maligned by his countrymen; wherever he unfurled the banner of the cross, the hand of violence assailed him; the thorn in the flesh, whatever was the trouble which he thus designated, seems to have been the occasion of much suffering to him. In his own graphic language, he had been 'in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often; in hunger and thirst, in fastings often; in cold and nakedness;' yet, when he viewed all the affliction through which he had

passed, and placed it in contrast with the weight of glory that awaited him, he speaks of it as *light*. The experience of the apostle is that of every genuine saint. His trials may be protracted and severe, but when he places them in the balances with the everlasting reward that shall be his portion, he is ready to adopt the language of Paul in another place, and say, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'

The contrast betwixt his present suffering and the bliss of the celestial inheritance was not the only consideration that weighed with the apostle in leading him to bear with patience the tribulations of earth. He was sustained under his affliction by the thought that it was employed by the Divine Spirit as an instrument to prepare him for the pure and perfect bliss of the celestial world. That the trials of earth are intended and overruled by God to increase the holiness of the believer, and thus fit him for the unsullied purity of his future inheritance, is a truth clearly taught in Scripture. That such a result has been produced by the trials and sorrows of earth is a fact which the experience of thousands will attest. Could we be admitted to converse with the multitude around the eternal throne, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and ask them what are now their views of the sufferings through which they passed here below, would they not tell us that they remembered them only with gratitude, as they served to stimulate their zeal, and thus qualified them for high positions of bliss in the celestial kingdom? 'No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby.' Affliction in itself is a curse rather than a blessing; it is one of the sad effects that have flowed from the introduction of sin into our world. Had man's

conscience never been defiled by guilt, the heart would never have been wrung with sorrow nor the body racked with pain. But the entrance of sin and the beginning of sorrow were coeval in the history of our race; and from human guilt, as a great fountain, all the evils that now desolate our earth are to be traced.

But in the experience of the child of God the curse is changed into a blessing; affliction becomes an instrument in the hand of infinite love to raise his affections above things seen and temporal to things unseen and eternal. In the words of an eloquent writer, 'Sorrow has been styled the winter of the soul, because it freezes up the streams of comfort, and ices the soul over with frosts of sadness; but like as that season, rough and stormy and bleak as it is, is conducive to the ultimate fertility of the earth, so the moral winter at once prepares for the fuller enjoyment of the coming spring of peace, and is productive of a richer harvest of righteousness, to the glory and praise of God. Affliction has been styled the storm of life; but like as those tempests that agitate the bosom of the ocean serve alike to overpower the shattered bark and to urge forward others more speedily to their desired haven, so these moral tempests, while they may overwhelm the wicked and impenitent, are ever conducive in speeding forward the journey of the children of the kingdom to heaven and to God. Affliction is like the gushing waters that fell around the ark of Noah when the windows of heaven were opened, that served to destroy an unbelieving race, but which only served to lift up the ark on their bosom, bearing it above the earth, and elevating it nearer to heaven.'

Growth in grace is, in other words, growth in ripeness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Humility, patience, resignation, and heavenly-mindedness are the features that appear in the character of the Christian

pilgrim as he directs his steps to the city which hath foundations. But is it not oftentimes by affliction and bereavement that these graces are developed, and made to shine with a radiance which reflects the soft hues of the Sun of Righteousness? Just as the diamond emits a brilliant light after it has been subjected to a process of rasping and polishing, so the faith, the love, and the hope of the believer give forth a new lustre after the Divine Spirit has sanctified the afflictive dispensations through which he has been made to pass. It is when the dark night of tribulation sets in upon him that he estimates things earthly at their true value, and realizes the need of making diligent preparation for that world whose joys are substantial and divine. It is then that he sees sin in its true light, as something not only hateful in itself, but which has introduced disorder into his own moral constitution; and he therefore clings more firmly to the cross, that he may obtain deliverance from its guilt and power. It is then that, feeling the inadequacy of earthly friendship to impart to him all the comfort that he needs, he turns his eye to the promises of the sacred page, and sees in them the tokens of a Father's love, and the earnest of the fellowship that he is to enjoy with Him when time shall be no more. With such blessed results flowing from affliction, well may the believer bear up with patience under it, and, contrasting it with the exceeding weight of glory for which it is preparing him, regard it as a blessing for which he ought to cherish devoutest gratitude.

Let the sentiment of the apostle exert its due influence upon me when I am visited by sorrow and affliction. That I may bear up with calmness and resignation under the trials of earth, let me place these in contrast with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory that awaits me. My suffering may be protracted and severe, but if it serves to prepare me for the perfect bliss of the celestial home, why

should I murmur and repine? One hour of heaven will be more than a recompense for a lifetime of tribulation on earth. Affliction, at the longest, is but short, but the bliss that is in store for me is unending in its duration. The battle which I am called to fight may be trying and severe, but great is the reward of fidelity—it is a crown of life that fadeth not away. That I may bear the trials of earth with patience, let me reflect on the estimate which I shall form of these trials when I take my seat in the mansions of bliss. There they shall only be remembered with gratitude, as they served to quicken my zeal in the divine life, and fit me for the seraphic joys of the divine presence. Sorrows and disappointments, that now oppress and grieve me, will then be the occasion of songs of loudest joy. Let patience, then, have its perfect work, for the dark night of affliction shall be followed by a day of unending bliss.

'In affliction though I linger,
Waiting for the break of day,
From the promises I gather
Hope to cheer my pilgrim way.

'For beyond the present moment
Does Thy guardian care extend,
Passing, from time's narrow limit,
To the life that has no end.

'More than worth the present sorrow
Is the land I hope to gain;
Only give Thy Holy Spirit,
And I can no more complain.'

XXXIII.

NO TEMPLE IN HEAVEN.

'And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple in it.'—REV. XXI. 22.

TO the eye of a Jew, no spot on earth possessed such hallowed and touching associations as the temple. With delight he repaired to the sacred edifice to worship the God of his fathers, and celebrate those feasts whose recurrence reminded him of stirring events that had transpired in the history of his nation. By the sacrifices and burnt-offerings there presented, his mind was directed to such truths as enlarged his views of Jehovah's character, and brought him into more intimate communion with Him. Often, amid the cares and anxieties of life, would the recollection of the hallowed hours that he had spent at Jerusalem and in the temple cheer and sustain his oppressed spirit; and with eagerness would he look forward to the occasion of his next visit, when, in company with his assembled brethren, he should recount the blessings which Jehovah had conferred upon his nation. The sentiment of the Psalmist, with reference to the delight which he experienced in the services of the sanctuary, doubtless found an echo in the breast of every true Israelite: 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

What the temple was to the devout Jew, the Christian

church is now to the believer. His dearest associations cluster around the edifice in which he hears the gospel proclaimed, and obtains supplies of grace and strength to help him in his journey heavenwards. As the weekly return of the Sabbath affords him the privilege of entering the courts of God's house, he is ever ready to adopt the sentiment of Watts, and sing:

> 'I have been there, and still would go;
> 'Tis like a little heaven below.'

But while the sanctuary is the centre of light and joy to the believer, the apostle beheld no such erection in his vision of the celestial world. He 'saw no temple therein.' The absence of a temple from the heavenly Jerusalem was a circumstance which would at once arrest the attention of a Jew; for in his mind the Holy City was always associated with the gorgeous building within whose precincts he held intimate communion with Jehovah. The beloved disciple had often gazed on the sacred edifice, and, in company with his Master, engaged in its ritual service; but now, an exile on Patmos, as he surveys the glories of the New Jerusalem, he looks in vain for any resemblance to the earthly temple.

The absence of a temple from the New Jerusalem is at once explained: 'For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple in it.' The presence of the Father and the Son so fills the dwelling-place of the redeemed, that there is neither room nor occasion for a special building set apart to their service. The necessity for edifices being consecrated to the praise of Jehovah arises from the fact that this is a world of sin, and therefore the worshipper must separate himself from those influences that would mar and disturb his devotions. As an eloquent writer has remarked: 'There was no temple required in the first

Eden. *There* our first parents, in the days of their innocence, worshipped God under the blue vault of nature's temple. Sin first demanded some special localities for religious worship—consecrated spots partitioned off from the world. There was no need of sheepfolds, so long as no wolf prowled abroad. But when sin and Satan gained entrance, the little flock required the sheltering covert, wherein they might rest in safety.'

But in the celestial world sin will be unknown; no cloud of unbelief shall dim the saint's vision of the divine character; there he shall stand in the immediate presence of Jehovah, and gaze upon His glory, not through the imperfect medium of faith, but face to face. When the Jewish leader confronted God at Horeb, he was told to unsandal his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. But no such command can be given in the heavenly world, for there every spot is holy. No act of sin will taint the purity of the atmosphere amid which saints and angels dwell. The presence of the Godhead will so fill heaven as to constitute it one great temple of love and praise. The Almighty is not confined, indeed, to the heaven of heavens; He is everywhere present; regions the most remote in creation feel His power and acknowledge His sway. In the language of the Psalmist, 'If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.' But in the celestial world His presence is felt not only in sustaining and preserving life, but in diffusing unspeakable happiness and joy among all the hosts of the redeemed. There He opens the treasures of His wisdom, and imparts to them right views of His nature and perfections. There the mysteries of Providence, as they are one after the other unravelled, will awaken in their minds

sentiments of gratitude and wonder. Heaven will be one great mirror, in which the character of God shall be portrayed; and as the saints look upon that character, they shall not only obtain a deeper insight into its glories, but become more and more assimilated to it. There will be no temple therein, for their fellowship with the eternal Father, instead of being carried on through the imperfect medium of ordinances, shall be immediate.

The mention of the Lamb constituting with the Father the temple of heaven suggests the important truth that, on the ground of His mediatorial work, the services of the saints will be accepted in the New Jerusalem. It is as the *Lamb* that Jesus is here represented; and the name at once points to the cross of Calvary, on which, as man's Redeemer, He offered Himself a sacrifice for sin. While the essential glory of His divine nature will shine forth with a radiance that shall inspire the redeemed with reverence and awe, He shall ever be recognised by them as the Daysman whose sufferings procured them a title to the bliss which they now enjoy. Still will He act as their medium of access to the Father, and open up to their glorified minds fresh views of the divine character and perfections. As the great fountain of their bliss, how ardent will be the love that they shall bear to Him, and how close and endearing will be the fellowship which they shall hold with Him! His humanity will ever remind them of the intimate relation that He sustains to them. They shall see Him as a man like themselves; and as they recount the scenes of His earthly life, when, a homeless wanderer, He had not where to lay His head, and, as their Substitute, agonized on the accursed tree, their sentiments of gratitude will find expression in the rapturous song: 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to 'receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.'

Are God and the Lamb to form the temple of heaven? Then how pure and elevated must be the service that is there performed! That I may be qualified for engaging in the seraphic worship that is there ascribed, let it be my great ambition to possess an increasing measure of holiness on earth. As a means to the attainment of this important end, let me use with diligence the ordinances which the Redeemer has appointed to be observed in the Church Militant. These ordinances are not needed in heaven, for He to whom they point is visibly present to His glorified people in the realms of bliss. But in this world of sin, where there is so much to becloud my views of God's character, and alienate my affections from Him, prayer, the sanctuary, the Sabbath, and the Lord's Supper are wells of salvation, out of which I draw supplies of spiritual nourishment to help me in my journey heavenward. Let me, then, abound in prayer, that I may obtain all needed grace to fit me for the services of the New Jerusalem. Let me view the earthly sanctuary as the vestibule that conducts me to the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Let me regard the Sabbath as a cord, woven by the hand of infinite love, to draw my affections from things earthly and transient to realities unseen and everlasting. Let me, in observing the Lord's Supper, seek such fellowship with the Redeemer that it may be an earnest of the more intimate communion with Him that shall be enjoyed when faith shall be exchanged for sight.

'Far beyond the grave's dark night,
What bright temple meets my sight?
Softly stealing on the ear,
What strange music do I hear?
'Tis the golden harps on high!
'Tis the chorus of the sky!

'Give my soul the spotless dress
Of Thy perfect righteousness;
Then at length, a welcome guest,
I shall enter to the feast,
Take the harp, and raise the song,
All Thy ransomed ones among.'

XXXIV.

QUALIFICATION FOR CELESTIAL BLISS.

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'—MATT. VII. 21.

SELF-DECEPTION in religion is one of the greatest dangers to which the professed pilgrim to the celestial world is liable. A mistake here involves consequences of the most serious nature. The man who imagines himself a true Christian, while in reality he is not, is, in some respects, in a much more perilous condition than that of an individual who has spent a whole lifetime in utter unconcern about his soul's salvation. Such an one believes that the work of conversion is accomplished in his experience; whereas the truth is that it is not begun. He considers himself secure for eternity; whereas he is every hour exposed to the infliction of the divine wrath. He considers that he is already in Christ, and therefore possessed of all the blessings of redemption. He imagines that he is on the road to heaven, while he has not taken the first step in the journey thither. Having thus lulled himself into the sleep of spiritual indifference, the danger is that he may never awake from it till he stands at the judgment-seat of God, and has his true character disclosed to him.

How important, therefore, it is that the believer should have in his mind a clear understanding of those characteristics which distinguish the true pilgrim to celestial bliss!

What these characteristics are may be easily ascertained, for they are clearly unfolded in the word of God. Now, among the evidences of discipleship to Christ, there is not a more unmistakeable one than that laid down by Himself in the passage before us. Here one standard is erected to which all professed fitness for celestial glory must be brought. The language of the Redeemer supposes that there may be the appearance of piety without the reality, and that a claim may be set up for admission to heaven which will be set aside as worthless at the judgment-bar of an omniscient God. If the heir to an earthly inheritance is concerned about the validity of his title-deed, how much more anxious ought the Christian to be to possess such a character as shall furnish evidence of fitness for the heavenly kingdom!

Conformity to the divine will is here indicated by Christ as the test of meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. It is the characteristic of a perfectly holy being that his will acts in harmony with the will of the Creator. What the mainspring is to the watch, the will is to the actions of the life. If the mainspring be broken, the whole machine is thrown into disorder; and so, in the moral nature of man, if the will is depraved, all the other faculties are estranged from God. Thus, when man by transgression fell from his allegiance to the authority of Heaven, his will, instead of acting in conformity with the will of the Almighty, became a centre of alienation from Him. The result is, that man, in his degraded condition, instead of obeying the divine will, follows the dictates of his depraved nature, which lead him widely astray from his happiness and duty. He acts with as much disregard of the authority of God as if He was persuaded that He had no existence, and never considers, before entering on any line of conduct, whether it will secure His approval or call forth His condemnation.

Widely different is the character of the true children of God, whose natures have been regenerated by the influences of the Holy Spirit. The will of God is the rule and guide of their life. It is true that, so long as they are possessors of a depraved nature, they will be unable to yield a perfect compliance with the divine law, for sin will be found mingling with their best and purest services. On earth, they cannot do the will of God as they hope to do it in heaven. There, it is done perfectly; here, after every effort, but imperfectly. But still, notwithstanding the difficulty they experience in acting up to the requirements of the divine will, that will is the grand and only rule of their life; and if a doubt should arise in their minds as to the course they ought to pursue, they are ready to say, with their great Exemplar, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'

The great design of the religion of Christ is to produce a sanctifying change in the will of the sinner. It proposes to subdue that will, proud and stubborn by nature, and conform it to the will of God. And whenever the gospel is received into the heart, and effects its legitimate results, such a change will always appear in the life and conduct. The fervent desire of the renewed soul will be, that every action may be stamped with the divine approval. What an illustrious example of the change that takes place in the will of the sinner, when that will is operated upon by divine grace, is furnished by the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the truth of Christianity! He was on his way to Damascus, to vent his wrath on the followers of the new religion which threatened to subvert the rites and ceremonies of Judaism, when there surrounded him a dazzling light, from amid whose splendour the solemn inquiry issued, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' His reply, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' calls forth the startling announcement, 'I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.' Instantly the working of divine grace is

seen in the readiness of the awakened convert to bend his will to the will of the Redeemer: 'Lord,' he exclaims, 'what wilt Thou have me to do?' It is as if he had said: 'Conform my will to Thine. Point out to me the path of duty, that I may walk therein. Let the life which I live in the flesh be consecrated to the furtherance of Thy glory.' The experience of Saul in his conversion is that of all the genuine subjects of divine grace. So soon as the Holy Spirit exerts His influence upon them, they endeavour, in the strength of the aid which He imparts, to devote the powers of their minds and the energies of their bodies to the service of their Creator. They seek to yield themselves up to Him for all the purposes for which they were created and have been redeemed. Freed from the guilt of sin, and made heirs of a glorious immortality, they feel themselves laid under the deepest obligation to live not unto themselves, but unto Him who loved them and gave Himself for them.

From the language here employed by the Redeemer, it is not to be inferred that compliance with the divine will is the procuring cause of admission to the heavenly kingdom. Such a doctrine can find no countenance from the teachings of the inspired volume. By no course of conduct, however exemplary, by no merit whatever of his own, can man obtain a title to immortal bliss. Free and sovereign grace will be the only ground on which entrance can be gained to the celestial world. Obedience to the divine will is the result or evidence of discipleship to Christ, but not the condition on which the gift of eternal life is conferred.

The character which the Redeemer here describes furnishes evidence of fitness for admission to the celestial world, as it is the only character that is exhibited in that world. Angels yield a perfect compliance with the will of God; and the exalted happiness which they possess flows

from the ready obedience which they render to His commands. Among all the ranks of the redeemed and glorified from the lost race of man who surround the eternal throne, every pulsation of their souls beats in harmony with the divine requirements. There holiness, perfect and unsullied, is stamped on every thought and action. The submission to the divine will rendered is not constrained but spontaneous, and prompted by the workings of pure and ardent love. The renewal of the will on earth is thus the preparation of the individual for the sublime and seraphic service of the world of bliss. Just as a poor and ragged orphan, who has fallen heir to a rich inheritance, is taken by his guardians and educated for the position of honour which he is afterwards to fill, so the Holy Spirit renovates the moral nature of the sinner, that thus he may be qualified to join with the myriads of the ransomed in consecrating his powers to the advancement of the divine glory.

The description here given of the character of those who alone shall gain admission to the celestial world may serve as a touchstone whereby I may judge whether I possess the qualifications that shall fit me for its holy society. Let me, then, ask myself the question whether my life is regulated by the divine requirements. Does my will act in harmony with the divine will? Vain will be all pretensions to piety, if I do not attain to the standard here set up by Christ Himself. Let it, then, be my earnest prayer, that the Holy Spirit would sanctify my will, that thus I may possess the evidence which shall entitle me to an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of my Lord and Saviour.

'My God! my Father! while I stray
Far from my home on life's rough way,
O teach me from the heart to say,
Thy will be done!

'Control my will from day to day,
Blend it with Thine, and take away
Whatever makes it hard to say,
Thy will be done!

Then, when on earth I breathe no more,
And life's sad conflicts all are o'er,
I'll sing upon a happier shore,
Thy will be done!'

XXXV.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES.

'Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.'—HEB. XII. 1, 2.

THE design of the apostle in this passage is to stimulate Christians to diligence in the prosecution of their heavenward career. As an incentive to effort, he assured them that they were surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, who had themselves run the Christian race, and gained the prize of eternal life. The parties more immediately referred to as 'a cloud of witnesses,' are the Old Testament worthies, whose deeds of faith are commended in the preceding chapter. Like brilliant stars hung out in the firmament, and which serve to guide and animate the traveller as he pursues his course amid the dangers and darkness of midnight, so the apostle held up the holy actions of departed saints, that the Christian converts to whom he wrote might, by the contemplation of them, not only admire them, but obtain fresh stimulus to exertion in their path heavenwards.

The imagery employed by the apostle in enforcing upon believers the duties of the Christian life is evidently drawn from the games which in ancient times were practised in different parts of Greece. Among these games, which attracted a vast concourse of visitors from the surrounding nations, that of racing held a prominent place. On either

side of the course allotted to the runners, tiers of seats were erected; and these were thronged by eager spectators, who loudly applauded the superior agility of the successful competitors. The Christian has a race to run, and, like the racer in the Grecian games, his object is to gain a prize; but a prize of inconceivably greater value than that which was conferred on the victor at Olympia. The crown of eternal life is the prize on which his heart is set. The coronet that adorned the brow of the successful competitor at Greece was only a wreath of evergreen, which retained its verdure for a few days, and was then seen to wither and decay. But the crown that shall be placed on the Christian's head, when he has terminated his earthly course and entered upon his everlasting reward, will never become dim, but increase in brilliancy and lustre as eternity rolls on in its ceaseless course. While the corroding influence of time is observable on all things earthly, while the fashion of the world passeth away, and its honours are held only for a few years at longest, the crown which the Redeemer will confer on His ransomed follower when he comes off victorious from the fight will never be laid aside, but be worn for ever, as the badge of the triumph over sin and temptation which divine grace enabled its possessor to achieve. With such a prize in store for the believer, how strong and powerful are the motives which should influence him to press forward with zeal in the path that leads to a reward so glorious and distinguished!

To animate the believer to diligence in running the Christian race, he is assured that he is encompassed by a great cloud of witnesses. These witnesses, as we have seen, are glorified saints, who once had to struggle with the difficulties and temptations of earth, but have entered on the possession of their everlasting reward. Though they have terminated their connection with the affairs of time they are represented as interested spectators of the course

pursued by those who, having set their faces Zionwards, are pressing forward in their journey thither. The primary idea intended by the apostle in this reference to departed saints is, that we are surrounded by their examples, and that the contemplation of these should stimulate us to tread in their footsteps, that thus, like them, we may gain the prize of eternal life. It is a significant fact that a large portion of the word of God is occupied with the lives of eminent saints; and the design of the Holy Spirit in causing such to be recorded was, doubtless, that believers in every age might be led to imitate the graces of character by which they were distinguished. The faith of Abel, when he beheld in the lamb that he laid upon the altar a type of the great sacrifice which in after ages was to be offered for sin, is brought before us, that like him we may look to the blood of Christ for pardon, and obtain a place in the world of glory which he was the first of the human family to enter. The devotedness to the divine will which characterized Abraham, when he was ready at the call of God to take the life of his beloved Isaac, stands out in prominent letters in the sacred page, that like him we may make any sacrifice which duty requires, as we pursue our course to the city that hath foundations, and which he sought and found. The choice of Moses, when he preferred to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, is commended, that like him we may declare ourselves on the Lord's side, and obtain an entrance into the celestial Canaan that he occupies, but of which the earthly land of promise that he saw from Pisgah was but the faint type. The delight which David experienced in the services of devotion is recorded that we may be encouraged to hold frequent communion with Jehovah, and that, like him, we may gain possession of the fulness of joy and the pleasures which are for evermore. The examples of these and other departed saints are held up

for our imitation, so that if our zeal in running the Christian race should be in danger of flagging, we may be stimulated to renewed exertion as we contemplate the positions of glory to which they, by faith and patience, have attained. The cloud of witnesses who have fought the good fight and come off victorious, in effect say to us by their example: 'Be not weary as you pursue your Christian course, for when you reach the goal, the prize that shall be conferred upon you is glorious. Strength suited to your need will be imparted to you in every hour of difficulty. As we ran the Christian race, we found the grace of the Redeemer sufficient for us; and when we gained its termination, animating was the welcome that He addressed to us. High is the position of bliss that we now occupy, and to that position you may attain if you follow in our footsteps, and rely upon the same almighty arm.'

But did the apostle, in describing believers as encompassed by a great cloud of witnesses, intend no higher idea than that the lives of departed saints are recorded in Scripture for their imitation? It is the opinion of some commentators that his reference is to the feeling of deep interest with which the ransomed in the realms of bliss contemplate the career of their brethren who are still struggling with the difficulties and tribulations of earth. Such a view, taken in connection with other parts of the word of God, is not hastily to be set aside as extravagant. We know that angels, those pure and exalted beings who bask amid the glory of the divine presence, are interested spectators of the triumphs which divine grace accomplishes in the heart of the sinner. As soon as the tear of sorrow is seen trickling down the cheek of some stricken penitent, the tidings are wafted from earth to heaven, and awaken songs of loudest rapture among the innumerable company of angels who reflect Jehovah's image. We are told that they encamp around them that fear the Lord, and that they

are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. As God's messengers, they oftentimes visit our earth, to mark the progress and extension of Messiah's kingdom, and impart direction and comfort to believers amid the difficulties that beset them in their path heavenwards.

If angels exhibit such a deep interest in the salvation of the human race, can it for a moment be supposed that departed saints will be kept in ignorance of the spiritual welfare of their brethren, from whom the narrow stream of death separates them? Can the thought be entertained, that when angelic choirs raise a song of rapture as the news reach them that an awakened sinner has found peace by the blood of the Cross, that glorified believers will be silent and unconcerned spectators of their joy? May we not rather conclude that their felicity will be greater than that of angels, as tidings are conveyed to them of the triumphs which grace is achieving on that earth which was once their abode? We may even suppose that they oftentimes accompany angels in their errands of love to our world, and assist in imparting comfort to their brethren who are struggling against temptation or overwhelmed with sorrow. May they not, though unseen, and in a way which we cannot now comprehend, exert an influence upon some friend or relative, that shall stimulate him to increased diligence of preparation for his celestial inheritance?

Am I surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have terminated their Christian course and gained the prize of eternal life? Let the thought quicken my zeal and inspire me with fresh courage as I run the race that is set before me. As I mark their footsteps, let it be my desire that I may tread in them; as I contemplate their holy example, by which they being dead yet speak, let it be my fervent prayer that grace may be given me to imitate it. As they, while on earth, were distinguished for holiness, love to the

Redeemer, and devotedness to His service, let it be my constant endeavour that these features may appear in my own character. As there is reason to believe that glorified saints in heaven are to some extent acquainted with the course pursued by believers on earth, let the conviction exert its due influence upon me. How animating is the thought, that departed friends may at times visit the earth, to mark my growing ripeness for heaven, and impart to me strength suited to my need! If uncertainty, however, hangs over the relation that is borne by departed saints to believers in this world, one thing is sure, and that is, that if I am indeed a child of God, I shall before long be admitted to their exalted society, and enjoy immediate fellowship with them. Let me, then, wait with patience till the summons is addressed to me, *Come up hither*, when I shall be introduced to the company of the wise and good of every age and clime.

REUNION.

'I shall meet the many parted ones
In that one home of joy;
Lost love for ever found again
In that dear home of joy.

'We have shared our earthly sorrows
Each with the other here;
We shall share our heavenly gladness
Each with the other there.

'We have mingled tears together,
We shall mingle smiles and song;
We have mingled sighs together,
We shall mingle smiles and song.'—BONAR.

XXXVI.

THE RACE FOR THE PRIZE.

'Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.' —HEB. XII. 1, 2.

THE Christian life is exhibited in Scripture under a wide variety of aspects, and in all of these activity is one of the most prominent features. In the believer's desire to gain the prize of eternal life, zeal and perseverance must characterize his efforts. He is said to be on a journey; and that implies that he is to make steady progress in his preparation for the celestial country. He is represented as in a state of warfare, with enemies numerous and formidable to encounter; and he must gird on his spiritual armour, to be ready at any moment for the fight. He is engaged in an important work, and in the performance of it unceasing diligence and activity must be put forth. But no figure more beautifully and forcibly exhibits the necessity for untiring exertion on the part of the believer than that of racing, which is employed by the apostle in the passage which heads this evening's meditation. Just as the racer in the ancient games strained every nerve that he might reach the goal and win the prize, so the believer, in pursuing the course that leads to the city which hath foundations, must press forward with vigour and alacrity that he may not lose his crown.

The race which, as believers, we are called to run, is a

'race set before us.' The course which we are to pursue is marked out by the hand of unerring wisdom. We are not left to grope our way in the dark, for the path that leads to eternal life is so clearly indicated in the word of God that no inquiring mind can mistake it. The letters on the finger-posts are so distinct that he who runs may read. It is said, in connection with the arrangements of the ancient cities of refuge, that every facility was afforded to the manslayer to reach them, and thus escape from the avenger of blood. The roads that led to these places of safety were wide and level, and no obstruction was allowed to lie on them. At every turn, directions were suspended, pointing out to the trembling fugitive the path to pursue, that thus he might lose no time in his efforts to elude the grasp of his foe. With equal clearness is the path that conducts to the harbour of eternal safety indicated in the word of God. The believer can trace in every part of his journey heavenwards the footsteps of those who have gone before him and won the prize of eternal life. At every turn in his path he sees the inscription, 'This is the way; walk ye in it.' While the man who sets aside the guidance of the sacred oracles is lost in the mazes of unbelief, the true inquirer after heaven cannot miss the road, for it is marked out by the hand of infinite wisdom, and all who tread it to the end will gain the promised inheritance.

In running the race for the prize of eternal life, the apostle urges believers to lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset them. Here, again, he employs a figure drawn from the practices of the Grecian games. When the racer was about to enter the course, he laid aside his upper garment, lest it should entangle him and retard his speed. So the believer who would reach the goal, and gain at last the approval of his Lord, must divest himself of every incumbrance that would impede his progress. Alas! what multitudes, who once

votional spirit, humility, and benevolence. Then, when I have terminated my earthly career, shall my assimilation to His image attest my union to Him, and my interest in His love. Looking unto Jesus, let it be my desire to obtain from Him the guidance which I need as I run the Christian race. Let me ever be ready to listen to His voice when He points out to me the path that I am to tread, even though it should be beset with thorns and difficulties. Looking unto Jesus, let it be my desire to obtain His sympathy under the troubles and difficulties that may befall me. When my heart is wrung with sorrow, and calamities in thick succession overtake me, let me ever look to Jesus for that comfort which He alone is able to give. With the prospect of passing before long into an unknown eternity, and mingling amid scenes which to me are now invisible, let me look to Jesus, who has the keys of Hades and of death, and He shall conduct me in safety to the regions of unclouded bliss, where, in fellowship with Himself and the company of the redeemed, my cup of joy shall be full.

'My thoughts are with departed ones,
In the mansions of the blest;
And fain I'd make my exit too,
And wing my way to rest,
As sad and desolate I mourn
For absent ones for ever gone.

'But waste not time in idle grief;
Arise! secure the crown!
Up, up, my soul! to work! to work!
Time's sands will soon be down.
Arise, and prune thy wings to fly
To the departed ones on high!'

XXXVII.

ASSURANCE OF HEAVEN.

'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.'—HEB. VI. 11.

THE apostle in this passage urges believers to seek full assurance of their interest in Christ and their hope of celestial glory. This is an injunction which, though addressed to all professing Christians, seldom receives that measure of attention which its importance demands. When a man falls heir to an earthly estate, he carefully examines the validity of the titles, he eagerly consults his lawyer about any point of difficulty that may present itself, and he gives himself no rest till he feels certain that he shall enter on undisputed possession. But while the gospel makes known an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and at the same time points out the way whereby it is secured, how little is it regarded, even by multitudes who profess to believe in its reality! Were Christians to realize the grandeur of the destiny that awaits them,—the joys of God's presence in which they shall participate, the fellowship with the Redeemer to which they shall be admitted, and the companionship with angels which shall be their privilege,—would they not use all diligence, and leave no means untried, to make their calling and election sure?

On the subject of assurance of hope, different opinions have been held by Christians. Some believe that it is as essential to salvation as the faith from which it

springs, and that no religion is genuine where this experience of the Christian life is wanting. Others, again, have gone to the opposite extreme, and maintained that assurance is a blessing beyond the reach of mortals. They are ready to admit that prophets and apostles, men inspired by the Spirit of God, possessed this gift, but they regard the expectation of it now as an act of folly and presumption. Now a careful examination of those passages that bear on the point will lead to the conclusion that the truth lies between these two extremes, and that, while Scripture nowhere avers that assurance is necessary to salvation, it at the same time teaches us that it may be attained by all who seek it in faith.

That assurance of salvation is a blessing within the reach of Christians, is evident from the fact that they are enjoined in the word of God to seek its attainment. Thus, in the passage which heads this evening's meditation, Paul urges believers to use diligence that they may obtain 'full assurance of hope.' Writing to the converts at Corinth, the same apostle exhorts them, 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' Again, addressing the members of the Church at Galatia, he calls upon them to sit in judgment upon themselves, that they may decide whether they are the genuine disciples of Christ, and thus derive from this conviction the comfort which it is fitted to impart: 'If a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another.' In these passages, Christians are expressly enjoined to seek assurance; and the inference is thus clear and undoubted, that the blessing is within their reach. The inspired writers would not urge them to desire an object which it was impossible for them to obtain.

While believers are urged to seek assurance, and are thus encouraged to hope that it is within their reach, still further to encourage their desire of obtaining it, the word of God presents many examples of saints who lived in the possession of it. Not to speak of Old Testament worthies, such as Job, David, and Jeremiah, who evidently had an unclouded assurance of the divine favour, the experience of believers, as recorded in the New Testament, clearly indicates that they had a firm persuasion of an interest in Christ and the blessings of His redemption. John, the beloved disciple, for example, appears to have felt as sure of an entrance into heaven as if he had already trodden its golden streets, and walked along the banks of the pure river that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 'Beloved,' says he, 'now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is' (1 John iii. 2). And again, 'We know that we have passed from death to life.' Here the apostle speaks of other believers besides himself as possessed of an assurance of the divine love, and animated with the hope of celestial glory; thus showing that the blessing is within the reach of ordinary Christians as well as men specially inspired by the Spirit of God. The experience of Peter, as brought out in the two epistles which he wrote for the guidance and consolation of the Church in all ages, clearly intimates that he read his title clear to the heavenly inheritance. Who can doubt this after reading his triumphant language?—'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you' (1 Pet. i. 3, 4). The great Apostle of the Gentiles, as the result of the strong faith

that he exercised, looked forward with calmness and composure to the hour of his departure from earth, as he felt persuaded that he should then be admitted to intimate fellowship with the Redeemer in the realms of bliss. He speaks of absence from the body as presence with the Lord. Expecting every hour to be the victim of the iron vengeance of Nero, whose inveterate hatred to the Christian name he must have known, he felt that he was leaning on the almighty arm of the Captain of his salvation, and could contemplate his martyrdom with rapture. 'I know,' says he, 'whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day' (2 Tim. i. 12); 'For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day' (2 Tim. iv. 6–8).

That the believers whose cases have now been cited possessed a firm assurance of the divine favour, is evident from the language which, under the influence of inspiration, they employed in describing their spiritual state. But in recent as well as in Bible times, many Christians, who have possessed a large measure of faith and a high degree of holiness, have attained to the full assurance of hope. Who can read the lives of Baxter, Janeway, Doddridge, M'Cheyne, and many others, without coming to the conclusion that these eminent saints were not only during their earthly sojourn ripening for the inheritance incorruptible, but had a well-grounded conviction that at the hour of death they would enter on its possession?

It is thus evident that assurance of an interest in Christ —in other words, assurance of a title to the heavenly inheritance—is a blessing within the reach of believers. Why, then, is it an element so frequently wanting in the

experience of professing Christians? The answer is to be found in the low attainments in the divine life with which they rest satisfied. Their faith is weak, and, as a natural consequence, their hope of heaven is dim and clouded. Faith is the root of all Christian experience, and according to the strength of the root will be the brightness of the graces that spring from it. Genuine faith will always be accompanied by holiness of life; and as faith grows, the believer will reflect more of the spotless purity of the divine nature. Hence it is that Christians who possess assurance are generally those who are far advanced in religious experience, and who bear the closest resemblance to the image of the Redeemer. It is no doubt true that sometimes assurance appears immediately to follow conversion, as in the cases of the Ethiopian eunuch and the jailor at Philippi, both of whom possessed spiritual joy at the hour of their new birth, as the result of the faith which they had begun to exercise. But, as a general rule, it is a gift found only in the breasts of those whose faith has gathered strength by years of trial, who have triumphed over the manifold temptations that beset a life of holiness, who have glorified God in the furnace of affliction, and whose characters have been most closely assimilated to the divine image.

Let me, as a professed pilgrim to the celestial world, give all diligence, that I may attain to the full assurance of hope. If a doubt exists in my mind as to my interest in Christ, and my title to the eternal life which He purchased, let me seek, in the strength of divine grace, to have that doubt removed. That I may possess assurance of the divine favour, let it be my earnest prayer that my faith may be genuine, and then my hopes of heaven will be bright and clear. As a means of judging of my spiritual state, let me place my character alongside those marks of true religion that are found in the word of God. In view

of such tests as the following: 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Matt. xii. 50); 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature' (2 Cor. v. 17); 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts' (Gal. v. 24);—let me put to myself the inquiry, Is my will conformed to the divine will? Am I a new creature, and am I conscious that a great change has been wrought in me? Have I crucified the flesh, and is it my constant effort, in the strength of divine grace, to place the passions of my nature under the control of religious principle? If I can give a satisfactory answer to these inquiries, then I have attained to the full assurance of hope, and with certainty I can look forward to heaven as my eternal home. As assurance, like the graces of the Christian character, admits of degrees, let it be my fervent desire that it may increase in strength. Let me cling more firmly to the cross of Christ, and imitate more closely His spotless example, and then my prospects of coming glory will become brighter and clearer.

'It does not take us long to reach
Heaven's holy, blessed land;
A few short moments, and the soul
Upon its shores may stand.

'We are but travellers below;
Death holds the wondrous key—
One turn, and lo! the unseen world
Reveals its mystery.

'Then I can calmly trust my all,
Nor fear death's quick surprise,
But joy to think that one short hour
May find me in the skies.'

XXXVIII.

HEAVEN: A NIGHTLESS WORLD.

'There shall be no night there.'—REV. XXII. 5.

NO part of the word of God abounds with such vivid representations of the celestial world as the Book of Revelation. The beloved disciple who penned it had qualifications for portraying the bliss of the redeemed around the throne such as no other inspired writer possessed. He did not only, like Isaiah, obtain a few glimpses of heavenly glory—an extended panorama, comprising a description of the New Jerusalem, with its streets and palaces; its inhabitants, with their dress and employments, passed before his eye. As he writes, for the comfort and instruction of the Church in all ages, an account of what he saw when the veil which hides eternal realities from the gaze of mortals was lifted, how varied, but at the same time how sublime, are the themes that come under review! As we read his narrative, we feel as if we were standing by his side, and permitted to look through the glass which brought the glories of heaven so near to his inspired vision. And yet the views, vivid and striking though they are, which John obtained of the bliss of the celestial world, are negative rather than positive in their character. If he tells us at times what is in heaven, as frequently does he make known to us what is not there. Its felicity so infinitely transcends the highest happiness of earth, that human language is too meagre to describe it; and therefore, to aid our contemplation, we are informed

that one element in it will consist in an entire absence of those evils that now embitter our lot.

Among the negative descriptions of the celestial world which John gives in Revelation, is that which is now to engage our attention: 'There shall be no night there.' In a literal sense, there will be no night in heaven, for that bright world will never be overshadowed with darkness. Day and night, with their attendants light and shade, are the natural phenomena of a world constituted like ours. They are the necessary consequence of the diurnal revolution which the earth performs on its axis. But has not night its drawbacks and inconveniences? How dreary would be our condition when the great orb of day disappears in the western horizon, but for the artificial means which man has contrived to make up for the absence of natural light! Doubtless night has its pleasures, and not the least of these is the opportunity which it furnishes of enabling us to contemplate the displays of the Almighty's power and wisdom that sparkle in the firmament above us. But what is it that renders the orbs which shine forth in the face of heaven so attractive to our gaze? Is it not the brilliant light that they emit, and which serves to relieve the gloom by which we are surrounded? Were it not for the soft radiance which these celestial luminaries shed over our path, how thick would be the pall that should overspread our earth! In such a case, what additional force and beauty would be seen in the sentiment of Solomon: 'Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun!' (Eccles. xi. 7.) Were light withdrawn from our world, it would soon become one great desert, from which life, happiness, and beauty had disappeared.

If light is a thing so precious, that the absence of it would convert our earth into a scene of gloom and desolation, how transcendently glorious must be that world

on which the shades of darkness never fall! There, day will not alternate with night, but its scenes of bliss will sparkle in uninterrupted brightness. As the eye of the glorified saint ranges over the scenery of the celestial state, no cloud or shadow will appear to dim his perspective. God is the great Fountain of light, and His presence, felt among all the ranks of the redeemed, will diffuse universal joy and gladness. In the eloquent words of Dr. Robert Ferguson, 'Heaven will be one pure and perfect mirror, in which God Himself will be for ever imaged, and for ever seen. As the stars in our firmament are so many points of light, there every spirit will be the reflection of still higher brightness. A world all light must be a world all lovely; and in proportion to the pureness and fulness of the light, must be the depth and perfection of the loveliness. If there be such a thing as beauty, it must exist in the divine nature; and if the effluence of God's glory—the everlasting flowing forth of that ineffable splendour in which He dwells—be that which lights up the heavenly world into perfect day, then lovely and attractive must that world be, beyond the force of words to express and the power of imagination to conceive. One spot on the sun of that world would create an everlasting cloud, and one shade over its fair scenes would mar and blemish them for ever. All other worlds may be left in darkness, but here the sun is ever high, and all life blooms with beauty.'

In heaven there will be no night of intellectual darkness. Sin has not only alienated the affections of man's heart from God, but shrouded his mind in ignorance. Not to speak of the moral and spiritual darkness that overshadows heathen nations, on whom the rays of gospel light have never shone, how dim are our perceptions of truth, even with the volume of revelation in our hands! How little do we know of the character of God, so that, like the patriarch of Uz, we are constrained, after the most diligent study

to comprehend His attributes, to exclaim, 'Oh that we knew where we might find Him!' How vain are all our endeavours to discover the nature of the connection that subsists betwixt the three persons of the Godhead, and how these, though differing in their operations, constitute one Supreme Being! While we admit the fact that the doings of the Almighty must be distinguished by unerring wisdom, still how often, to our short-sighted vision, does the great machinery of Providence seem to be characterized by disorder and confusion! How small is our acquaintance with the relation that we bear to God, and the destiny that awaits us when death severs our connection with earth and time!

But in that bright world on which the darkness of night never broods, how unclouded will be our perceptions of those truths which now we so dimly comprehend! There the vision, strengthened to a degree that shall correspond with the glorified position of the saint, shall be ever clear, and capable of taking in at a glance themes that on earth were shrouded in mystery, and which no intellectual effort could unravel. The perfections of Jehovah, which we now see but dimly reflected in the operations of nature, shall then be beheld resplendent with glory, and awakening seraphic songs of awe and admiration. There the mediatorial honours of Christ will sparkle in presence of the myriads of ransomed ones who found mercy and eternal life through faith in His sacrifice. His divinity, not veiled, as it once was, beneath a robe of humanity, shall then appear radiant with majesty, while love will be seen shedding a halo of glory over all His other attributes. The Holy Spirit, whose work in regenerating the heart is on earth but imperfectly understood, shall then be recognised as the grand agent who qualified the saints for the exalted enjoyments of the celestial state. What a flood of light will then be poured on the history of the plan of

human redemption, from the hour that it was devised, down through all its developments, and on to its final results in eternal ages! The arrangements of Providence, which to man, encompassed by the darkness and infirmities of earth, oftentimes appeared mysterious and inexplicable, will, amid the cloudless glory of the celestial world, be found to have been characterized by unerring wisdom and infinite love. The cross, the affliction, or the bereavement which once wrung the heart of the believer with sorrow, and led him to regard the doings of the Almighty as harsh and austere, will then be regarded as the proofs of His tenderness and compassion. No mist shall hang over the heavenly horizon; no cloud shall intervene between the splendours of the divine character and the vision of the glorified saint; no distressing doubt or fear will ever lodge in the mind.

Is the contrast between earth and heaven so striking? Then let me prepare with all diligence for the hour that shall see me exchange the darkness and imperfection of time for the cloudless glory of my celestial abode. Among the motives that should stimulate me to set my affections on things above, one is, that in the future world a more enlarged view of the great system of truth is obtained. Here the progress which I make in the acquisition of knowledge is tardy. When I would soar to the contemplation of eternal realities, ignorance, like a heavy clog, enchains me to the earth; a cloud of haze and uncertainty hangs over every theme that engages my attention. But in that bright world on which the shades of night never fall, every truth will be understood in its true character and relations. There will be no darkness in the intellect nor error in the judgment to obscure the vision. Problems in science, which the most profound philosopher on earth cannot solve, the saints in heaven will comprehend at a glance. The Infinite One, whose glories are so dazzling that I am now

repelled by the contemplation of them, I shall there behold face to face. In Him is no darkness at all, and in His light I shall see light. Let me, then, seek to increase in holiness and resemblance to the divine character, that thus I may be qualified for the revelations that shall be made to me when faith shall give place to sight.

'Oh, talk to me of heaven! I love
To hear about my home above,
For there doth many a loved one dwell
In light and joy ineffable.
Oh, tell me how they shine and sing,
While every harp rings echoing;
While every glad and tearless eye
Beams like the bright sun gloriously.
Tell me of that celestial calm
Each face in glory weareth;
Tell me of that victorious palm
Each hand in glory beareth.'

XXXIX.

HEAVEN: A NIGHTLESS WORLD.

'There shall be no night there.'—REV. XXII. 5.

IN our last meditation we saw that in heaven there will be no night of physical and no night of intellectual darkness.

We continue the theme, and now observe that there will be no night of sin in heaven. It is sin that has converted our world into a scene of darkness and desolation. The earth, when it was fitted up as the residence of the human family, presented a spectacle so fair and lovely, that the all-wise Creator, as He cast His eye over it, pronounced it very good. No feeling of guilt oppressed the conscience of man, and no barrier existed to his daily and intimate communion with heaven. But, alas! the introduction of sin cast a blight over our world, and converted it into a scene of rebellion against the authority of the Most High. The human heart, instead of reflecting the spotless purity of the divine nature, became the seat of unholy passions. The will, instead of acting in harmony with the will of the Supreme, was a centre of alienation from Him. Sin, like a great fountain, sent its streams over the wide earth, converting every land into a scene of guilt and desolation.

The grand design of the gospel of Christ is to dispel the moral and spiritual darkness which sin has spread over our world; and where its offer is embraced, the light of heaven shines into the heart. But still the believer, if he walks in the sunshine of God's love, finds his path at times

overshadowed by gloomy doubts and fears. The mists and clouds of unbelief frequently intercept the radiance of divine truth, and dim his vision of celestial glories. The work of grace, which gradually mortifies the corruptions of his nature, is begun on earth, but is not perfected till he resigns his connection with time, and reflects, in the immediate presence of Jehovah, the spotless purity of His character. After all his efforts to advance in holiness, sin will be found mingling with his best services, and retarding his progress heavenwards. By reason of his shortcomings he has oftentimes to walk in darkness, and mourn over the hidings of his Father's countenance.

But over the scenes and enjoyments of the celestial world sin will never throw its pall. No cloud of unbelief will hang over the services of the saints, to obscure their vision of Jehovah's glory, or interrupt their fellowship with Him. Beneath the flowers of the celestial Paradise no venomous serpent will lurk, to lure them from the paths of rectitude. On earth, the progress of the believer in holiness is often hindered by the society of those among whom he is called to mingle. But in his heavenly home his companions will be angels, who, from the hour of their creation, have never swerved from their allegiance to the authority of the Creator,—and the ransomed from among men, whose natures have been refined, freed from every taint of imperfection, and assimilated to the unsullied purity of the divine character. On such a world the dark shades of sin will never fall.

As the necessary result of the absence of sin from heaven, there will be no night of sorrow there. Between sin and suffering there is an inseparable connection. What is it that has converted our world into a scene of mourning and desolation? It is sin, which took its rise in Paradise, and created a gulf of separation between the human race and God! With his mind alienated from the source of all good,

man is a stranger to happiness till he seeks it in reconciliation with Heaven through faith in the cross. But even the heart of the believer in Christ, possessed though it is of a peace which passeth all understanding, is oftentimes oppressed with sorrow and suffering. By the merit of the Redeemer's blood he is absolved from the curse and penalty of sin; but so long as he is a stranger and sojourner on earth, he will taste of the bitter fruits of sin. As a fallen child of Adam, he must, to a large extent, share in the troubles and afflictions that fall to the lot of mankind in general. He is liable to disease, and for weeks and years his body may be racked with pain. Like Job, he is at times forced to exclaim, 'Wearisome nights are appointed to me.' He may spend years in anxious toil, that he and others depending on him may be placed in a position of comfort, but some unforeseen accident may plunge him in a moment into the depths of poverty. Death, when least expected, may enter his household, lay low his nearest and dearest relative, and convert his home into a scene of mourning and desolation:

> 'Friend after friend departs—
> Who hath not lost a friend?
> There is no union here of hearts
> That finds not here an end.'

However great may be the happiness which is enjoyed by man, however numerous may be the pleasures which are open to him, earth is not inappropriately termed *a vale of tears*, and in his pilgrimage through it he oftentimes comes to a *Marah*, where he must drink of the waters of bitterness.

Contrasted with the troubles and afflictions that fall to the lot of man on earth, how transcendently glorious must be that world on which the dark night of sorrow never falls! In the eternal home of the redeemed, the tear will

never bedim the eye; for happiness, perfect in its nature and eternal in its duration, will be their portion. Disease, with its ravages and agonizing pains, will there be a thing unknown. Hope will never be frustrated, but realized in the fulness of bliss. Friendship will never be marred by unfaithfulness, or interrupted by death. The funeral procession—a sight, alas! so common in this vale of tears—will never be seen on the streets of the New Jerusalem. The rough storms of earth and time will be never heard; on the peaceful shores of the celestial Canaan the cold waters of affliction will never rise. There will be no night of sorrow there.

With such a contrast between heaven and earth, let me be stimulated to cultivate spiritual-mindedness. Why should earth, which is a scene of sin and imperfection, absorb so much of my affections? Here the fellowship which I enjoy with the Redeemer is marred by the pollutions of sin. In the celestial world it will be close and intimate, and ready access to His person will be my constant privilege. Here I have to mourn over the fruits of indwelling sin, and, like the apostle, am frequently forced to exclaim, 'When I would do good, evil is present with me.' There I shall be freed from every taint of imperfection, and be holy as God Himself is holy. Here I dwell in a world which sin has desolated by trouble and affliction; and however great may be the happiness which I enjoy in it,—happiness for which it becomes me to ascribe praise and gratitude to the Giver of all good—still, at an unexpected moment, some bitter ingredient may drop into my cup of joy, which shall lead me to turn from it with loathing. Death lays low my nearest and dearest friends, and grief often wrings my heart as I see their remains consigned to the narrow house. But in my eternal home sorrow shall never becloud my soul, for nothing shall enter there to hurt or to destroy. Disease shall be unknown;

crosses shall never be experienced; friendships shall never be sundered. Let, then, the prospect of coming glory exert its due influence upon me. Let me seek to place my affections on that world where the darkness of night is never felt.

'O happy, happy country, where
There enters not a sin,
And death, who keeps the portals fair,
May never once come in.
No grief can change their day to night—
The darkness of that land is light;
Sorrow and sighing God has sent
Far thence to endless banishment,
And never more may one dark tear
Bedim their burning eyes;
For every one they shed while here,
In fearful agonies,
Glitters a bright and dazzling gem
In their immortal diadem.'

XL.

THE REDEEMER'S POWER OVER THE INVISIBLE WORLD.

'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.'—REV. I. 18.

HERE we have a portrait of Christ drawn by His own unerring hand. The curtain that hides His glory from the view of mortals is, as it were, lifted, and we are privileged to look on the divine perfections that adorn His character. He institutes a contrast between His present position and the death to which He was subjected when He suffered in the room of sinners. Once He died, but death was not again to number Him among its victims. Now He lived, and He should be alive for evermore. The suffering to which He submitted was past, and He was now to reap the reward of His humiliation and sacrifice. The sceptre of the universe was in His hand, and all events were under His direction and control.

One truth taught by this declaration of the Redeemer is, that He knows from personal experience what death is. Now He lives, but once He was dead. As not only the Forerunner, but the Substitute of His people, He had to bow His head before the stroke of the last enemy. Death is the wages of sin; and although He had no sin of His own, He had to endure the penalty that was due to the guilt of others. His body, that was created by the power of the Holy Ghost, was suspended in agony on an igno-

minious cross; and as He exclaimed, 'It is finished!' life became extinct, and for three days the grave held Him as its victim. His eye, which had sparkled with love and compassion, was closed in death; His arm, which was to wield the sceptre of the universe, was for a time powerless; His voice, which had often uttered invitations of mercy, was silent.

What encouragement does the fact of Christ's death impart to His people in the prospect of encountering this their last enemy! Like their Master, they must bow the head and give up the ghost, for it is appointed unto men once to die, and that appointment they cannot evade. They must bid farewell to all that on earth they hold dear; friends and relatives, with whom they often took sweet counsel together, must be left behind. Perhaps weeks, months, or years of agony may be appointed them before the final struggle comes. They must enter the valley of the shadow of death, and their bodies, now full of vigour and elasticity, must moulder in the silent grave. But amid all the gloom that surrounds the approach of the King of Terrors, what comfort is derived from the thought that he was conquered by the Captain of Salvation, when He burst asunder the barriers of that tomb in which His lifeless body had been laid! Death has been deprived of its sting, and the grave is now hallowed as a resting-place for all His followers. Why should the believer regard the grave with feelings of unmingled dread, when his Friend and Mediator has lain there before him, and assured him that His own resurrection is the type of His people's?—'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him' (1 Thess. iv. 14).

Having triumphed over death, and been raised to a position of the highest glory in the heaven of heavens, the Redeemer is invested with supreme and unlimited power over the wide domain of creation. He holds in His

hands the keys of hell and of death. The word translated 'hell' is *Hades*, and literally signifies the invisible state. It comprises, on the one hand, the realms of bliss, to which the righteous are admitted, and the regions of woe, to which the wicked are consigned at death. Over the unseen state, and over death which admits to it, He has power—supreme and infinite power. He holds the keys of death, which is the only door through which an immortal being can pass from time into eternity. Our times are in His hand, and He fixes the hour when the soul shall be severed from the body and ushered into the presence of its Judge. Death, which is to the unconverted man the King of Terrors, and which is encircled only by mystery and gloom, He converts into a friend in the experience of His people, because it is to them the introduction to eternal felicity. He knows how to deprive the last enemy of its sting; and the sustaining influence of His presence, which He imparts amid the agonies of expiring nature, is the earnest of the fulness of joy which they shall possess in His immediate presence. As they enter the dark valley, He irradiates its gloom by the lamp of heavenly hope, takes them by the hand and guides them through its intricate windings, and inspires them with hope and courage as they raise the rapturous song: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!' (1 Cor. xv. 55.)

As the Living One, the Redeemer has the keys of *Hades*, or the unseen world. The place of woe, to which devils and the finally impenitent from among men are consigned, is under His control; and however bitter may be the opposition of its inhabitants to the principles of His government, they must own submission to His sway. The keys of the world of bliss, the eternal home of the redeemed, are in

His hand, and He has the power to admit to its glories all who comply with the invitations of His gospel, and whose characters are assimilated to His own image. He Himself has fitted up those mansions which are to be their everlasting abode; He, by His death and sacrifice, purchased the title-deed to their possession; and He, by the operations of His grace, qualifies them for the positions of glory which they are there to occupy. He will measure out the bliss which is to be their portion; He will ever open up to their glorified natures new sources of enjoyment; He will spread out before their enraptured minds enlarged views of His character and perfections; and as He directs their gaze over the wide domain of the universe, which was called into existence and will ever be sustained by His power, they will discover fresh proofs of His majesty and greatness. His infinite power will be the pledge for the everlasting continuance of their joys. As they look forward to the ages of eternity, no feeling of uncertainty will becloud their horizon, and no fear will ever arise in their minds that a period will come when their joys shall terminate. As Jesus, their Friend and Redeemer, is the First and the Last, and is alive for evermore, so their felicity, like His, will be unending.

What encouragement does the view of the Redeemer's character here presented open up to the believer in the prospect of His departure from time to eternity! Death is approaching; and as certain as I am now in the possession of life, shall I one day yield to its stroke. I must enter the dark valley and on the untried scenes that lie beyond. What is the nature of the destiny that awaits me if I die possessed of an interest in the Redeemer's merit, is a question regarding which, notwithstanding all the light reflected on it by the volume of revelation, my ideas are dim and indistinct. But what a comfort it is to know that Jesus, my Friend and Forerunner, has supreme and unlimited

power over the regions which to me are now invisible. He has the keys of *Hades* and of death; His knowledge extends to every corner of the universe; and His power is pledged to secure the eternal felicity of all who accept of Him as their Saviour. Let me, then, exercise a living faith in Him, and thus I may rest assured that He will be by my side when the summons comes for me to bid farewell to earth, and mingle amid the untried scenes of eternity. He will support me in the last conflict; He will give me grace to come off victorious; and He will perfect what is wanting to fit me for entrance into my heavenly home. He will introduce me to the society of the innumerable company of angels and the spirits of the just made perfect, fellowship with whom will be a source of the most refined delight. He will present me before the Father as a trophy of His grace, and a member of the great family of the redeemed, whom, through eternity, He shall contemplate with rapture as the purchase of His sufferings. Eternity, as it rolls on in its ceaseless course, will see no diminution of my joys; but rather will they be found to be ever on the increase, as I am drawn into closer communion with the First and the Last, who died for me, and is now preparing mansions of glory for my eternal abode.

'I know that my Redeemer lives;
What joy the sweet assurance gives!
He lives, triumphant from the grave;
He lives, omnipotent to save.

'He lives, my wise and powerful Friend;
He lives, and loves me to the end;
He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives, to guide me safely there.

'He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, eternally the same.
What joy the sweet assurance gives,
That Jesus, my Redeemer, lives!'

XLI.

THE WHITE-ROBED MULTITUDE.

'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.'—REV. VII. 9.

HOW rapturous was the scene which here burst on the view of the apostle, when, an exile on Patmos, he was privileged to look within the veil which separates things *temporal* from things *eternal!* His enemies had banished him to this solitary isle, in the vain hope that he would no longer be an instrument in extending the cause of the Christian religion; but how short-sighted was their policy! John might be excluded from the society of earthly friends, but he enjoyed intimate fellowship with the Redeemer, and obtained visions of celestial bliss, the contemplation of which was destined to cheer and animate the Church in every succeeding age.

On this occasion John was favoured with a view of the countless throng of ransomed ones who were once subject to the sorrows and tribulations of earth, but who, through faith in the merit of the Redeemer, had gained an entrance into the heavenly kingdom. He saw '*a multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues.*' The first idea suggested by the apostle's vision is the size of the company of the redeemed. So vast did it appear, that he speaks of it as a multitude which no man could number. Many intimations to the same effect are found scattered throughout the word of God.

Thus the Redeemer, to whose omniscient eye all the scenes of eternity lay unveiled, uttered the declaration, 'Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.' David speaks of the trophies of the Redeemer's grace as being in number like the dewdrops from the womb of the morning. We are assured, in another place, that the song of Moses and the Lamb is sung by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. In any particular age of the Church's history, indeed, their number has been comparatively small. In the days of His flesh they were but a little flock, and ever since they have been largely outnumbered by His enemies. Looking over the face of the earth, and contemplating the vast multitudes who have either never heard of salvation or rejected its offer, we might be disposed to give an affirmative answer to the question, 'Are there few that be saved?' But could our eye, like that of John, stretch across the boundary-line that separates time from eternity, we should behold a vast company of ransomed ones, who, on the ladder of faith, had gained possession of eternal bliss. In the days of the apostle they were a multitude which no man could number; but what large accessions have since been made to the celestial throng! Many in every age have found redemption through the blood of the Redeemer, and, crossing the Jordan of death, have added to the General Assembly and Church of the First-born.

The variety found among the ranks of the redeemed was another idea that struck the mind of John as he contemplated their position of bliss. They were out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. The religion of Christ draws its votaries from no particular race or clime. The offer of the gospel is presented to men indiscriminately, and the blood of the cross can purge away the guilt of any child of Adam. Gentiles from every corner

of the globe have come to the Redeemer's light, and princes to the brightness of His rising. The martial Roman and the idolatrous Ephesian, the refined Greek and the rude barbarian, were alike melted by the story of the cross, and now form part of the glorified throng who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Still is the gospel the power of God to every one that believeth; and from every land where its offer has been made known and accepted, ransomed ones, as death severs their connection with earth and time, are found entering the abodes of bliss, to join in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The inhabitants of countries separated by thousands of miles of ocean shall meet as brethren in the New Jerusalem, and, speaking the same language, shall converse together with adoring gratitude of the grace that made them fellow-heirs of eternal life. The civilised Briton and the untutored Hottentot, the shrewd American and the wandering Indian, the native of China and the Polynesian from the South Seas, shall all meet in the same heaven—shall all reflect the Redeemer's image—shall all tread together the golden streets of the city which hath foundations.

The position occupied by the glorified saints whom John saw in the celestial world was 'before the throne and before the Lamb.' The throne here referred to is the throne of the universe,—the centre of divine and almighty power. On that throne the Redeemer sits, controlling the destinies of all worlds, and receiving the homage of myriads of angels and ransomed saints. In another passage in Revelation, the representatives of the redeemed were seen by John as occupying a position nearest to the throne, while the angels, though older in creation, formed an outer circle. Standing in the immediate presence of Christ, and at the foot of the majestic throne on which He sits, how exalted is the honour that is thus conferred on the

ransomed children of our fallen race! Nearest to the Redeemer, they enjoy the most intimate fellowship with Him, and will ever receive at His hands the richest communications of His love. How enrapturing must be the view which they obtain of the glories of His character! If on earth He was esteemed by them the Chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely, what transports of joy must fill their minds as they see Him sitting on the throne of the universe, and His character resplendent with celestial glory! Ardent is the song of adoration that is sung to His name by the choirs of angels, who from the hour of their creation have beheld His glory; but what love and gratitude will blend with the praises of the redeemed, as they reflect that it was through His death and mediation that they reached the exalted position which they now occupy! As they contrast their present bliss with the degradation from which divine grace rescued them, how animated will be their strains as they sing the song, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!' (Rev. i. 5, 6.)

The white robes worn by the glorified throng whom John saw before the throne and before the Lamb next arrested his attention. White robes are frequently employed in the word of God as emblems of holiness. Angels, when they visited our earth, were uniformly represented as arrayed in white raiment, to indicate the spotless purity of their nature. The Redeemer Himself, when transfigured on the Mount, appeared in garments white as the light, that the three favoured disciples might have an impression of the resplendent glory of His character. Saints in the celestial world are represented as arrayed in white robes, as emblems of their spotless purity and their resemblance to the divine nature. Just as the

angel in the time of Zechariah, after stripping Joshua the high priest of his filthy garments, put clean raiment on him, so, at the moment of the ransomed sinner's admission to the bliss of heaven, every shred of his own righteousness is left behind, and he is arrayed in the spotless robe of his Redeemer's righteousness. A robe of resplendent beauty this is, adorned with the holiness and merit of incarnate Deity. The white raiment wherewith they are clothed is not only an emblem of their deliverance from guilt, and their acceptance in the eye of God on the ground of Messiah's righteousness, but it is also an indication of the spiritual renovation that has been effected on their character: 'Whom God justifies, them He also glorifies.' Once their nature was defiled—now it is perfectly holy. Once the image of Satan was stamped on their soul—now they bear the image of Christ. Once their affections were alienated from God—now they centre on Him as their chief good. Once their will was under the sway of sinful passions and desires—now it acts in perfect harmony with the will of the Supreme.

The palms which John saw in the hands of the redeemed were emblems of the triumphs which they had gained over sin and temptation. They are now more than conquerors through Him that loved them. It was common in ancient times for military heroes, on their return from the field of conflict, to carry branches of palm in their hands, as tokens of the success which they had gained over their enemies. So the glorified saints who stood before the throne were seen by John as bearing palms in their hands,—emblems of the victory which they had gained in their earthly conflicts. During the period of their probation, and before death, their last foe, was vanquished, they had to maintain a struggle with temptations numerous and manifold. Satan, their great adversary, assailed them, ready, like a roaring lion, to devour them. The influence of an ungodly world

was ever ready to ensnare them. Their own corrupt nature was ever liable to deceive them, and make them weary of the path that leads to glory. But through the strength which the Captain of their salvation meted out to them, they were enabled to hold their ground in the midst of their conflict; they were stedfast and immoveable when their spiritual enemies were plotting for their fall. Having been faithful unto death, they were greeted at the gates of heaven with the welcome, '*Well done;*' their heads were arrayed with crowns of glory, and in their hands were placed palms of victory.

As I contemplate the position of bliss occupied by glorified saints as they stand before the throne and before the Lamb, let me gird on my spiritual armour, and fight manfully under the banner of the Captain of Salvation, that at the hour of death I may be admitted to their exalted society, and become a sharer in their honours. Do I hope, through grace, to form a part of the great multitude out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who have found salvation through the blood of the cross, and associate with them as my brethren? Then let me now embrace within the folds of my affections the whole household of faith. Do I hope to stand in the immediate presence of Christ? Then let me now contemplate the glories of His character, that thus I may, in some degree, be qualified for holding immediate fellowship with Him in the world to come. Do I hope to wear a white robe in heaven? Then let me cultivate holiness of heart and life on earth, ever bearing in mind the solemn words that are inscribed on the portals of the New Jerusalem: 'There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life.' Do I hope, as I stand before the throne and before the Lamb, to bear in my hand a palm of victory? Then let me pray for a rich

measure of grace, to enable me to triumph over all the temptations that beset me in my path heavenwards.

'Those dwellers there are not like these of earth,
No mortal stain they bear;
And yet they seem of kindred blood and birth—
Whence, and how came they there?
Earth was their native soil; from sin and shame,
Through tribulation, they to glory came,—
Bond-slaves delivered from sin's crushing load—
Brands plucked from burning by the hand of God!

'Those robes of theirs are not like these below;
No angel's half so bright!
Whence came that beauty, whence that living glow?
Whence came that radiant white?
Washed in the blood of the atoning Lamb,
Fair as the light those robes of theirs became,
And now, all tears wiped off from every eye,
They wander where the freshest pastures lie,
Through all the nightless day of that unfading sky!'

BONAR.

XLII.

THE POSITION OF THE REDEEMER IN HEAVEN.

'Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.'—ACTS v. 31.

THE mediatorial work of Christ is not only to be viewed in relation to the period that, as a man, he lived in our world. It was then, indeed, that He offered the sacrifice, faith in which will secure salvation to multitudes of the human family. The state of humiliation through which He passed, however, was only a part, though an important part, of the work that He assumed as man's Redeemer. Far back in the counsels of eternity, His delights were with the sons of men; and then it was that He entered into a covenant with His Father, engaging to give Himself an offering for sin, and receiving in return the assurance that the offering should be accepted, and that it would avail to the salvation of all who should believe in Him. No sooner had sin begun to spread its blighting influence over our world, than there was given the promise of a deliverer, who should destroy the works of the devil, and restore man to the possession of the divine love and favour. To strengthen the faith of His people, He instituted sacrifices, that they might prefigure the great offering which He Himself was to present by shedding His blood as an atonement for the guilt of a fallen world. As the Angel of the Covenant, He presided in the Church during the Old Testament dispensation till the fulness of the time came, when

He appeared in the form of a man, to fulfil all the prophecies that had gone before respecting Him.

After Jesus had expired on the cross, and thus accomplished the great work which, as man's Redeemer, had been assigned to Him, His body was laid in the tomb of Joseph; but it was not long permitted to remain there. On the third morning after His crucifixion, the barriers of that tomb were burst asunder by Him, and He came forth from it, conquering death, and proclaiming Himself the Prince of Life. After appearing to His disciples, and assuring them of His presence and protection, as they sought amid difficulty and opposition to diffuse the knowledge of His name, He returned to that heaven whose glories He had laid aside when He appeared in the likeness of men. The highest position in the wide universe was now awarded to Him. But amid all the glory with which He was invested, He was not unmindful of the work of human redemption, which He died on the cross to achieve. He is exalted, but it is to be a Prince and a Saviour.

The phrase, *Him hath God exalted with His right hand*, might as correctly be rendered, *at His right hand;* and this was doubtless the meaning which the apostles, when they addressed the council, intended to convey. The general representation which Scripture gives of the position which Christ assumed in the heavenly world after His ascension, is that of *sitting at the right hand of God.* Thus Paul, in addressing the Hebrews, says, 'This Man, after having offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down at the right hand of God, from thenceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.' The phrase is figurative, and denotes that, having performed the great work of human redemption, He is exalted to the highest position of authority and power, and as having only to wait in calm repose till His enemies should be subdued, and, in a glorious manner, He should manifest Himself to an assembled universe.

The position of glory which Christ now occupies in the celestial world was assigned to Him, as the Redeemer of mankind, after His ascension. The great plan of human salvation, which had been devised in the counsels of eternity, He had wrought out by His lowly life and agonizing death. By the sacrifice which He offered, He had satisfied all the demands of justice, and made full provision for the pardon and everlasting happiness of the sinner. He was thenceforth to reap the reward of His mediatorial sufferings. The most exalted position in heaven is now assigned to Him. The hosannahs of angels are sung to His name. A revenue of glory will, through the coming ages of eternity, flow to Him as the result of His redemption work. All the souls saved by His death are so many proofs of its efficacy; and these will for ever shine as gems in His mediatorial crown.

Exalted thus to a position of the highest glory, Jesus has been constituted a Prince and a Saviour. He is a Prince or King, and as such is invested with infinite power. As the supreme and eternal God, as the equal with the Father, He was always possessed of almighty power. It was in the exercise of that power that He called into being the many worlds that compose the material universe. It is in the exercise of that power that He guides and controls the movements of the planets, the revolutions of the seasons, and the destinies of nations. It is in the exercise of that power — the power that He possesses as Creator — that animal life is sustained, that vegetation is produced, that day follows night and night follows day in regular succession. But while Christ, as God, was always possessed of infinite and almighty power, He was, at His ascension, invested with a new power for the accomplishment of an express purpose. As Mediator, all power has been given to Him in heaven and in earth. This power has been lodged in His hands that He may exercise it for the

furtherance of those objects which He died to accomplish. That power is now exerted in controlling all the events of providence, and making them conducive to His Church's welfare. That power is brought to bear on every sinner who is saved from guilt and restored to the divine love and favour. That power is put forth in protecting the saint, and imparting to him strength to enable him to overcome the temptations that beset him in the world. That power will be exerted, on the great day of final retribution, in raising the bodies of His people from the dust, and transforming them into a resemblance to His own glorified humanity. That power will be in exercise throughout eternity in opening up to the saints new sources of bliss.

Christ is not only exalted a Prince, but also a Saviour. It was as a Saviour that He appeared in our world, magnified the law which man had violated, and died on the cross of Calvary, that by the blood which He shed the guilt of sin might be washed away. The whole of His work on earth was the work of a Redeemer. But the mediatorial office of Jesus did not terminate after His ascension, for the apostle declares that He was exalted at the right hand of God still to be a Saviour. Now if Christ's work as a Saviour was not completed when, after His resurrection, He returned to the glory of heaven, the question arises, In what way is that work now carried on? Jesus still acts as a Saviour by making intercession for His people. Amid the glory that now surrounds Him, He is not unmindful of the position of those whom He died on the cross to save. He sees that by nature they are estranged from God, and He pleads that, on the ground of His sacrifice, reconciliation may be effected between them and Heaven. He sees them beset with temptation, and He prays that grace may be given them to enable them to overcome it. He sees that in this sinful world their graces are apt to languish, and He asks that the influences of the

Spirit may be imparted to them, so that their faith, their love, and their hope may be in bright and lively exercise. He sees them at times laid upon a bed of affliction, and He desires that the consolations of divine grace may be imparted to them. He sees them filled with dismay at the approach of the last enemy, and with the prospect of appearing, chargeable with ten thousand offences, at the judgment-bar of a holy and omniscient God; and He intercedes that, for the sake of His sufferings and death, they may, with their sins all forgiven, be enabled to pass in peace and safety through the valley of the shadow of death.

As I contemplate the position of glory which Christ now occupies in heaven, and the work in which, as man's Redeemer, He is engaged, let my earnest prayer be, that the power which is vested in His hands may be exerted in my behalf, and that I may have an interest in the intercessions which He is now presenting in the presence of His Father. How animating is the thought that He, whose love to the human family prompted Him to forego for a season the glories of the celestial world, assume the nature of man, and die on the cross of Calvary, now sits on the throne of the universe, and is willing to expend His unlimited resources to further the eternal welfare of all who believe on Him! As I pursue my journey heavenward, let me ever lean upon His almighty arm, assured that, as the Captain of Salvation, He will conduct me in safety to my eternal home. In my approaches to the throne of grace, to supplicate a growing meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, let the eye of my faith rest on the Great High Priest of His people, who now wears my nature and makes intercession for me.

'I change, He changes not—
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.

'The cross still stands unchanged,
Though heaven is now His home :
The mighty stone is rolled away,
But yonder is His tomb !

'I know He liveth now
At God's right hand above ;
I know the throne on which He sits ;
I know His truth and love !'—BONAR.

XLIII.

THE GLORIOUS RESULT OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

'Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.'—HEB. IX. 28.

THE coming of Christ to judgment is an event which will be closely connected with the happiness of the believer in the celestial world. The approving sentence, *Well done*, which shall then be pronounced upon Him, will be the signal for his conveyance to the realms of bliss, which, in time, he saw as very far off, and dimly with the eye of faith.

The phraseology here employed by the apostle to describe the second appearing of Christ has evidently a reference to the functions performed by the high priest, under the Jewish economy, on the great day of atonement. After offering a sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people, he entered the Holy of Holies, which was separated from the Holy Place by a veil of costly tapestry, and there offered intercession for the congregation, who were standing in the courts without. He then came out, arrayed in magnificent robes, and, raising his hands, pronounced a blessing on the assembled multitude. So Christ, the Great High Priest under the gospel dispensation, after laying down His life a sacrifice for the sins of His people, ascended to the right hand of His Father, there to make intercession for them; and, at the close of the world's history, He will appear in power and glory, to complete the salvation which on earth they in part enjoyed.

If we except the first coming of the Redeemer to our world, no event in all the annals of time can be compared, either in the grandeur of its character or the importance of its results, to His appearing on the day of judgment, to decide the destinies of the millions who shall stand before Him. When He first visited our earth He assumed the human form, and by a life of sorrow and a death of agony wrought out for fallen man the plan of mercy which had been devised in the counsels of eternity. It was then that satisfaction was made for the violation of divine justice; it was then that the vast gulf, which sin had created between earth and heaven, was bridged over; it was then that the foundation was laid upon which man might build the hope of everlasting bliss. But of a widely different character will be the design of Christ's second coming. He shall then appear to unfold the workings of divine providence, acknowledge as His friends those who complied with the offer of His redemption, and take vengeance upon all who refused to conform their lives to the principles of His gospel. When nature shall be following its wonted laws; when the sun shall be seen ascending the firmament in which he has shone for thousands of years; when mankind shall be devising or carrying out projects of ambition, suddenly every eye shall be directed upwards, to behold the once crucified Jesus descending in the clouds of heaven.

When Christ shall appear a second time upon our world, it will be *without sin.* The apostle does not here refer to the personal character of the Redeemer, for in that respect He was always without sin. 'He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.' 'He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.' As He trode our earth, He was untainted by the corruption that everywhere surrounded Him. Among the millions of individuals who have appeared on the stage of human existence, He alone, from the commencement of life to its close, maintained

unblemished purity of heart and conduct. But while the character of Christ was distinguished by sinless perfection, He was, when He appeared in the world the first time, identified with sin. 'He who knew no sin was made sin for us.' As the Substitute of our guilty race, He had to endure the penalty that was due to their transgression. It was to this end that He divested Himself of that glory with which from all eternity He had been surrrounded, and became arrayed, for a season, in the garments of fallen humanity. Thus, every sorrow that oppressed His heart, every pang that He endured during His earthly sojourn, was designed to effect a reconciliation between God and the sinner.

But the sufferings through which Jesus passed having for ever perfected them that are sanctified, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. The claims of divine justice being satisfied, the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane, the ignominy and pangs of Calvary, He will not again endure. When on the cross He exclaimed, '*It is finished*,' He was for ever freed from the guilt which He undertook to cancel. Accordingly, when He shall appear a second time, it will be without sin—without the sin which was chargeable upon Him when He acted as the Substitute of fallen man. *He shall appear without sin.* What a glorious and striking contrast will His coming then present to His first coming to our world! When He became incarnate, that He might procure redemption for the lost race of man, His glory was veiled from the view of mortals. Like an eclipse, which obscures the splendour of the noon-day sun, His assumption of human nature dimmed the lustre of His divinity.

At His second coming, however, He shall be seen by His people, not as a man of sorrows, but as the Lord and Governor of the universe. Then shall be fully manifested that glory which He had with the Father before the world

was. He who bowed His head before the stroke of the last enemy shall then ascend the great white throne, and, by the call of His omnipotent voice, summon all the tenants of the grave to life, to hear their irreversible doom pronounced. He shall indeed appear with that body which on earth was subject to debasement and suffering, but it shall then be beheld in a glorified form; and though it may still bear the marks of the wounds which were inflicted upon it when He hung on the accursed tree, these shall only exist as visible memorials to His people of His conflict and triumph.

The design of Christ in appearing a second time on our world will be twofold,—to reward His friends and punish His enemies; but the passage which forms the theme of our meditation only refers to the former of these. His coming to judgment is described only as it will affect the position and prospects of believers. When it is said that Christ shall appear *unto salvation*, the meaning is, that the everlasting blessings of salvation shall then be conferred. The bodies of the saints, that shall have slumbered for centuries or millenniums in the dust, shall then awake to life, and be transformed into a resemblance to the glorified humanity of Christ. They were sown in corruption; they shall be raised in incorruption: they were sown in dishonour; they shall be raised in glory: they were sown in weakness; they shall be raised in power. Soul and body, which had been separated by death, shall then be reunited, and conveyed by angelic messengers to the mansions of glory which infinite love has prepared for their reception. They shall then enter on a career of bliss which shall be lasting as the bliss of Jehovah Himself. Dwelling in the presence of Christ, their fellowship with Him shall be immediate, and no cloud of sin or unbelief shall ever rise to dim their vision of His glory. If salvation was divine in its plan and grand in its execution, it shall

assuredly be glorious in its full completion. If the blood of Christ was needed to ransom the soul of man, how transcendently glorious must be that place which was purchased at such a price! Golden harps, unfading crowns, and palms of victory are the faint emblems employed in Scripture to describe the bliss of heaven; but the reality will as far transcend the highest expectation as the brilliant light of the mid-day sun exceeds the feeble light emitted from a taper.

In view of the second coming of Christ, and the important results that shall flow from it, let me solemnly put to myself the question, Am I prepared to meet Him when He shall take His seat on the great white throne? If I have reason to believe that I have in reality looked to Him with the eye of faith, and found salvation through His blood, then my heart may well be filled with joy by the bright prospect that stretches out before me. Well may I resign the fleeting joys of earth and time, and welcome each returning year as it brings me nearer the grand object of my hope. The scenes of that illustrious day will indeed be such as to fill the minds of Christ's enemies with consternation and dismay; but He who is to preside as Judge has already avowed Himself as my Elder Brother, and He will not then be ashamed to own the relationship. He will not be a stranger, though arrayed in regal splendour. He has been by my side in the hour of difficulty and danger, and in the character of my Judge will not cease to be my Friend. As I meditate on the second coming of the Redeemer, let my earnest prayer be that my faith and hope may be in lively exercise, so that, amid the solemn scenes which I shall then witness, I may be found among the number of those who shall be greeted with the joyful welcome, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

'O morning star! O risen Lord!
Destroyer of the tomb!
Star of the living and the dead,
Lift up at length Thy long-veil'd head,
O'er land and sea Thy glories shed;
Light of the morning, come!

'Speak, mighty Life, and wake the dead,
Like statue from the stone!
Like music from long broken strings,
Like gushings from deserted springs,
Like dew upon the dawn's soft wings,
Rouse each beloved one!'—BONAR.

XLIV.

NO CURSE IN HEAVEN.

'And there shall be no more curse.'—REV. II. 3.

NEAR the beginning of the inspired volume, we find an intimation of the curse that was denounced on man for his disobedience to the authority of Heaven. 'Cursed,' said God to Adam, 'is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' When, in after ages, the written law was promulgated for the guidance of the Israelites, a curse was spoken of as the penalty of disobedience: 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of the law to do them.' But if the page of inspiration opens with an account of the introduction of sin into our world, and the curse that was inflicted upon man because of it, and if the law pronounces a curse on every member of the human family for his violation of the divine commands, the last chapter of the sacred volume speaks of a region where the curse shall be unknown. In the celestial home of the redeemed—in the blissful land which the Redeemer has purchased for them—in the immediate presence of Jehovah, where they drink of the pleasures that are for evermore, 'there shall be no more curse.'

Like many other representations of the celestial world that are found in the word of God, its bliss is here repre-

sented in a negative rather than a positive light. It tells us what is not there rather than what is there, and leads us to infer, from the absence of the ills that embitter existence on earth, the unalloyed character of the felicity that is enjoyed.

The phrase, 'there shall be no more curse,' brings before us the striking contrast between the desolation that sin has wrought on earth, and the perfect freedom *from* sin that shall be enjoyed in heaven. It was on account of sin that the curse descended upon man. But for sin, this earth would have presented a scene of loveliness and beauty. Suffering would never have been felt; sorrow would never have oppressed the heart; the bitter tear would never have trickled down the cheek. Conscience, undefiled by sin, would have reflected the spotless purity of the divine character; its dictates would ever have been in harmony with the requirements of heaven; and in its approval of the actions of the life, it would have been a perennial spring of joy. But through the introduction of sin into our world, a curse has alighted on the human family, which has blighted their happiness, and rendered them liable to unnumbered ills.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we discover evidences of the curse that has descended on our race on account of sin. Do we not see marks of the divine displeasure, which, but for guilt, could never have had existence in a world created and governed by the hand of benevolence? Exception has been taken to the sentiment of the poet, *that man was made to mourn*, as it seems to charge the Almighty with the misery and sorrow that have deluged our earth; but it is undoubtedly true that man, *by sin*, has made himself to mourn. It is indeed admitted that, notwithstanding the ravages that sin has wrought, much happiness is enjoyed in our world. Earth presents many scenes of loveliness; and man, as he contemplates these, and beholds in every

object a proof of the Creator's benevolence and power, is filled with wonder and delight. The eye, the ear, and the other senses are so many avenues through which happiness is conveyed to the mind. But still, whatever joy enters the lot of man in his fallen condition is only the faint echo of the bliss that was possessed by the first parents of the race when they walked in innocence in Eden. Human life presents the strange phenomenon of happiness alternating with sorrow, friendship with bereavement, prosperity with adversity. The birth of an infant is its first step in a thorny pilgrimage to the grave. Disease in a thousand forms invades man's physical system, and often lays the foundation of years of misery and suffering. How often are plans, which were formed after much anxious thought and deliberation, blasted, and their originators plunged into grief and disappointment! Death, ever busy, and which marks out the entire race of man as its prey, enters a household and consigns one of its members to the dust, filling the minds of survivors with mourning and lamentation. Every calamity that desolates the human heart is the fruit of the curse which was entailed upon man for his disobedience.

But in the celestial world, how striking will be the contrast between the exemption from all evil that is enjoyed there, and the misery and suffering which are oftentimes the lot of man on earth! In the eternal home of the redeemed *there will be no more curse.* The curse will be unknown, because sin will be unknown. The glorified inhabitants of that blissful region were once in subjection to the curse, but through faith in the Redeemer's sacrifice they were delivered from the sentence of condemnation which it pronounced on all transgressors. As their Substitute, who stood in their room and suffered in their stead, the curse rested upon Him, and formed the main element in that mighty load which overwhelmed Him in Gethsemane,

and constrained Him to utter the petition, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' From the hour that they looked to the cross, and trusted in the blood that washed them, they were no longer under the curse, but were, in the eye of Jehovah, justified and accepted. Although, however, freed from the condemnation of the curse, they had still, during their earthly sojourn, to experience its bitter effects. Suffering, which is the attendant upon sin, was oftentimes their lot. Like the rest of mankind, their hearts were frequently wrung with sorrow and bereavement; nor were they exempt from the corroding cares and crushing disappointments that chequer the career of the worldling.

But in heaven the saints are not only freed from the curse itself, but from all its bitter fruits. Sorrow, which so often oppressed their hearts on earth, is there unknown. Crosses and disappointments, which so frequently caused the tear to trickle down the cheek, are never heard of there. Bereavement, which dried up the springs of joy within them, as they saw one after another of near and dear relatives laid in the narrow house, will never be experienced there. Disease, which undermined their bodily functions, and in many cases caused months and years of racking pain, shall never invade the glorified bodies with which they have been invested. Death, which is the wages of sin, and consigned them to the dust, shall never cross the threshold of the New Jerusalem. There, the funeral procession will never be seen; the grave will never be dug; no mourners will go about its golden streets. With the curse removed, eternal life will be the portion of the redeemed. With the curse removed, no barrier will exist to the most intimate fellowship with Jehovah. With the curse removed, a stream of perennial happiness will flow to them from the great fountain of bliss. With the curse removed, the sufferings of earth will be remembered only that the contrast may awaken songs of loudest gratitude.

Shall there be no curse in heaven? Then let me seek to be delivered from its power and influence on earth. Let me pray that my faith may be a genuine faith, that thus I may not be under the condemnation which rests on every unpardoned sinner. Let me take my station beneath the shadow of the cross, that thus the arrows of the divine vengeance may never reach me. Thus, delivered from the blighting influence of the curse on earth, I shall in some measure be fitted for entering on the felicity of that world, where neither the curse itself nor any of its bitter fruits will ever be experienced. Blessed world, where sin and all its attendant evils will be unknown! Let my affections be set upon thee. Let earth engage less of my attention; and let me regard it only as a school, in which I am preparing for the full manhood of my being amid the light and glory of eternity.

'No shadows yonder!
All light and song;
Each day I wonder,
And say, How long
Shall time me sunder
From that dear throng!

'No weeping yonder!
All fled away;
While here I wander
Each weary day,
And sigh as I ponder
My long, long stay.

'No partings yonder!
Time and space never
Again shall sunder;
Hearts cannot sever;
Dearer and fonder,
Hands clasp for ever.'—BONAR.

XLV.

INVITATION HEAVENWARD.

'And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.'—NUM. X. 29.

THE history of the children of Israel is, to every Bible reader, fraught with the most lively interest. The events recorded are of such a character as transcend in importance all that have transpired in the annals of any other people. With what eagerness do we trace the varied and striking incidents that happened, from the time of Abraham, down through all the dealings of God's providence with them. Not unfrequently are we constrained to wonder that at every fresh perusal we see a beauty and feel a delight in the narrative which we never perceived or experienced before. But while the history possesses a beauty and finish as a whole, there are particular points which are invested with peculiar interest. It may be compared to a panorama, all of which excites our admiration, but on special parts of which we delight unceasingly to gaze. One of those touching scenes, frequently to be met with in the Mosaic narrative, is presented to our notice in the passage which we are now to consider.

Moses, having effected the deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of Pharaoh, was now, as their acknowledged leader, conducting them through the wilderness on their march to the promised land. As they pursued their

journey, they arrived at Sinai, where the great lawgiver had an opportunity of holding an interview with one to whom he was closely related. Animated by the prospect of the glowing privileges which he and the people of his charge, as the objects of the divine favour, should possess, he was eager that his kinsman should share in those privileges, and he therefore entreats him to cast in his lot amongst them.

The person with whom Moses held the interview which is here recorded is described as Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law. Some doubt has been entertained as to the identity of the individual designated by this name and relationship. In the second chapter of Exodus, the name of Moses' father-in-law is said to be Reuel, and in the third chapter it is said to be Jethro. The seeming discrepancy is easily explained. The names *Raguel* and *Reuel* are the same in the original; the difference is only in the translation. The word rendered *father-in-law*, in connection with the reference to Jethro, means simply a relation by marriage. It would appear, therefore, that Jethro was not the father-in-law, but the brother-in-law of Moses. As it was common in ancient times for the same individual to have two distinct names, the probability is that Jethro and Hobab were names that designated the same person; and that Hobab, with whom Moses held the interview which is here described, was Jethro, who is repeatedly mentioned in preceding parts of the sacred narrative.

Moses commences his address to Hobab by stating the object of the journey which he and his brethren were then pursuing: 'We are journeying to the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you.' It was a journey undertaken by the command of God to that country which for ages He had promised to their nation. But recently they had been subject to a grievous bondage in Egypt, and

exposed to barbarous cruelty at the hands of tyrannical masters. But God, from His throne in glory, had beheld their sufferings with an eye of compassion; remembered the covenant He had entered into with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; resolved that the chain of the oppressor should be broken, and His chosen people go forth to inhabit Canaan, which He in His sovereign pleasure had reserved for them.

As we have already seen, Moses was closely related to Hobab; and the likelihood is, that he had held frequent and endearing intercourse with him while occupied as a shepherd in the plains of Midian. Now that he and his brethren were pursuing their journey to Canaan, he was eager that his kinsman should accompany them, that he might share in the tokens of the divine favour which they, as the chosen people, should possess. In order to induce Hobab to comply with the invitation which he presented to him, he urges a variety of motives. He tells him that if he would consent to undertake the march to Canaan, his welfare would be promoted. He informs him that the people with whom he wished him to ally himself were the special objects of the divine favour. And when Hobab manifested a desire to continue in the country of his fathers, the Jewish leader renews his entreaty, and presses him with fresh motives to induce him to set out on the march to Canaan. Moses tells his kinsman that his wisdom and experience might be of much service to them while journeying amid the perils of the bleak and sandy desert.

Now the question arises, What was the good? what were the special privileges to which Moses alluded, and which he urged as reasons to induce Hobab to leave his home and associate himself with Israel? '*We will do thee good*,' said he; but the *good* could not refer to blessings of a merely temporal character, for he would have to engage in a journey that would not be terminated till thirty-nine

years afterwards, and in which he would be exposed to innumerable hardships and privations. But if we consider the spiritual privileges which Hobab would enjoy by casting in his lot with Israel, we shall at once perceive that the step which it was proposed he should take would largely redound to his advantage. It would do him good to associate himself with a people who were the special objects of the divine love and favour. It would be good for him to be in the place where tokens of the divine presence should be daily vouchsafed. It would do him good to hold regular communion with those whom God had chosen as His peculiar people. It would be good for him and his posterity that he should at length settle in a land where the God of heaven should make known the revelation of His will.

From the thirtieth verse of the chapter, it would appear that the representation which Moses made failed to induce Hobab to set out on the journey which had been proposed to him. 'I will not go,' said he, 'but I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred.' From subsequent statements, however, in the inspired narrative, we are led to believe that he at length complied with the invitation of his kinsman, left the country of his fathers, and went forth towards Canaan, a portion in which his descendants possessed.

As Moses was anxious that his relative should cast in his lot among the chosen people, that he might thus share in their privileges, so all the pilgrims to the celestial Canaan are desirous that others should accompany them on their journey thither. They look around them in the world, and as they contemplate multitudes of their fellow-men living in a state of impenitence and unbelief, they experience towards them feelings akin to those which prompted the Son of God to exchange the glories of heaven for the sufferings of earth, that He might procure

the redemption of our fallen race. Having realized the power of religion in their own hearts, and partaken of its blessings, they are anxious that others should share in the privileges which they themselves enjoy. As they are now heirs, and expect before long to be possessors, of a glorious immortality, they desire that the hopes which inspire themselves should animate the breasts of others. They are looking forward to the time when, at the bar of an omniscient Judge, they shall render an account of the way in which they have improved the talents entrusted to their care during the period of their earthly probation, and they therefore put forth efforts to make known to their fellowmen the glad tidings of redemption, that thus, by their instrumentality, souls may be saved, and shine for ever as gems in Christ's mediatorial crown. Actuated by love to Christ and compassion for immortal souls, they are ever ready to adopt the language of Moses to Hobab, and say to any unconcerned wanderer whom they meet in their path, '*Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.* Come thou with us, and we will bring thee out of darkness into God's marvellous light. Come thou with us, and we will deliver thee from the slavery of Satan, and introduce thee into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Come with us, and thy nature, which is now guilty and depraved, will be renewed, and fitted for holding immediate fellowship with the Redeemer in the world of glory. Come with us, and then, when thy earthly course has terminated, thou shalt find death converted into a friend, and the welcome of the Judge, "*Well done,*" shall be thy passport to the regions of everlasting bliss.'

Moses urged a variety of motives in inviting Hobab to cast in his lot with Israel in their journey to the promised land; but more powerful by far are the inducements which the believer can place before the sinner to lead him to begin the Christian pilgrimage. God had spoken good

concerning Israel. He had blessed them, and they should be blessed. Their journey through the desert might be long and tedious, but they were supplied with manna from heaven for their sustenance, and water, in copious streams, flowed from the flinty rock for their refreshment. Amid all the windings of their pilgrimage, they were guided by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And hath not God spoken good concerning His spiritual Israel? Every page of His word teems with assurances for their happiness and comfort. He hath spoken of rest to the weary, of solace to the afflicted, of balm to the wounded spirit. To those whose hearts have been wrung with bereavement, He hath spoken of a region where death-divided friends shall meet, never again to part. To those who desire more substantial happiness than this world can impart, He hath spoken of a garden of delights, where the flowers never wither and the fruits never perish,—of *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* All this good which the Lord hath spoken respecting His people, the believer knows will be realized in their experience; and, therefore, when, with a heart burning with love to Christ and immortal souls, he entreats the unconverted to set their faces Zionwards, he is confident that the course which he recommends will, if followed, result in their present and eternal advantage.

Am I a pilgrim to the celestial Canaan? Then let me imitate the example of Moses when he urged Hobab to cast in his lot with Israel, and labour to get others to accompany me on my heavenward journey. Have I not often allowed opportunities of speaking to the unconverted about their eternal interests, and urging them to embrace the offer of mercy by Christ, to pass by unimproved? Have I not reason, when I reflect on the little that I have done for the salvation of souls, to utter the lamentation:—

'Much of my time has run to waste,
Though I perhaps am near my home?'

Let me, then, in what remains of my earthly pilgrimage, put forth efforts to add to the number of Christ's followers, and thus swell the ranks of the redeemed in glory. Are any of my relatives strangers to divine grace, and unconcerned about their eternal welfare? Let me labour and pray that they may be brought within the pale of the divine favour, and thus become possessors of endless felicity. Are any of my neighbours treading the broad road that leads to destruction? Let me invite them to the narrow path that conducts to everlasting bliss. If, through my instrumentality, souls are brought to a saving knowledge of the truth, and admitted to the celestial world, what an accession to my happiness will result from my fellowship with them through the ages of a blessed eternity! Let the thought animate me to diligence in my efforts for the cause of Christ, so that, when my earthly course has terminated, I may be greeted with the joyful welcome, '*Well done,*' and a place may be assigned me among those who, *having turned many to righteousness, shall shine as stars for ever and ever.*

'Beset with snares on every hand,
In life's uncertain path I stand;
Saviour divine! diffuse Thy light,
To guide my doubtful footsteps right.

'Engage my wand'ring, treach'rous heart,
Wisely to choose the better part;
To scorn the trifles of a day
For joys that never fade away.

'If Thou, my Saviour, still be nigh,
Cheerful I live and joyful die;
Secure, when mortal comforts flee,
To find immortal bliss in Thee.'—DODDRIDGE.

XLVI.

RIPENESS FOR GLORY.

'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'—2 TIM. I. 12.

HERE we have a precious piece of testimony to the power and value of the gospel of Christ. The apostle, at the time that he penned these words, was a prisoner at Rome, and shut out from all that the world calls *comfort;* but he found in the religion that he professed an unfailing fountain of joy. He knew that before long he should appear before Nero,—a man whose hatred to the Christians was so intense, that he is said to have expressed the wish that they had all one neck, that he might put an end to their life by a single blow. And yet, with the near prospect of falling a victim to the vengeance of such a monster of cruelty, with what calmness and composure does he contemplate his approaching martyrdom! Nero might throw him to the lions, and they would tear his body in pieces; but he felt assured that his soul was safe. The ruthless tyrant might insult him, scourge him, and put him to the most excruciating death; but ignominy and suffering he dreaded not, for he knew that, absent from the body, he should be present with the Lord. His faith, which, from the hour that he was made a subject of divine grace on the road to Damascus, had enabled him to triumph over all the obloquy and persecution to which he was subjected as a herald of the cross, now shone forth in all its heavenly

lustre. After many years of self-denying service in the cause of the Redeemer—after the experience which he had of His power to bless and defend him in every time of danger—after witnessing the peace and comfort which the Christian religion imparted to the converts whom he had been instrumental in bringing under the influence of the truth, Paul could from the heart say, '*I know whom I have believed;*' and under the influence of the impression that He is able to make me a possessor of everlasting bliss, I have committed to His keeping the eternal interests of my soul, with the sure hope that, on the judgment-day, He shall again appear to raise my body from the dust, to reunite it to my spirit, and to make both body and spirit the occupants of the house eternal in the heavens.

The apostle speaks of a deposit which he had made into the hands of Christ. This was the spiritual part of his nature, his never-dying soul. He knew how other saints, in the prospect of the eternity that lay before them, had committed their eternal interests to the keeping of the Redeemer. While an enemy to the Christian cause, he had stood by the side of Stephen, and heard him, while a shower of stones was being hurled at his defenceless head, offer, with his dying breath, the petition, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' In imitation of this example, which was doubtless engraven in letters of gold on the pages of his memory, he entrusted his eternal interests to the custody of that Redeemer who cheered and sustained the proto-martyr amid the agonies of dissolution. It was no earthly possession about which the apostle was concerned. The things of time and sense were too transient in their nature to occupy his thoughts or give him one moment's anxiety. The desire to be united to Christ by faith, and thus to cherish the hope of enjoying His fellowship for ever, were the objects that filled the mind of the apostle, both amid his labours as a herald of the cross, and now, when he was

calmly awaiting the hour that was to terminate his connection with earth.

Like the apostle, every genuine believer in Christ will exhibit an anxious concern about the eternal welfare of his soul. The things of earth and time must indeed occupy a considerable share of his attention. While he is fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, he is also to be diligent in business. Even in the hour of death, when earth is fast receding from his view, and the realities of eternity are about to burst on his enraptured vision, the believer may innocently feel solicitous about the affairs of time. The sight of friends who are to be left behind—the husband, the wife, the parent, the child, the brother, the sister—will awaken anxious fears respecting the difficulties and trials that may await them in life. But with the genuine saint, such feelings, although they may at times disturb the tranquillity of the mind, are light and transient when put in the balances with the interests of the immortal soul. Like the apostle, he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. How infinitely important it is that, like Paul, we should hold the concerns of the soul in such high estimation! Little will it matter in what part of the world we take our departure from the present scene, or where our dust reposes. But the soul, at the hour of death, enters on its eternal destiny, and, if possessed of faith in the Redeemer, becomes at once a partaker of bliss unspeakable.

The believer, impressed with right views of the value of his soul, and an anxious concern for its future welfare, entrusts it to the keeping of Him who has the keys of hell and of death. It was into *His* hands that the apostle committed his everlasting interests, and he was satisfied that there they were safe. Like Paul, every saint has confidence in the ability of Christ to secure his eternal salvation. He knows that He to whom he has fled for refuge, while

He is a man like himself, is at the same time the great and infinite God; that in His arm is lodged almighty power; and that, as in the exercise of that power He created and sustains in being all worlds, so by the same power will He preserve his soul from danger, and raise it to the enjoyment of endless bliss.

When a person has a valuable treasure, he does not put it into the hands of one whom he cannot trust; he commits it to the keeping of a friend in whom he has confidence. Now the believer is possessed of a treasure more valuable far than all the riches of the world. That treasure is the immortal, never-dying soul. We might gather together all the gold that is buried in the bowels of the earth, or owned by its inhabitants, place it in one scale and an immortal soul in the other, but that one soul will far outweigh the wealth that lies opposite. We might bring together all the possessions of the richest men that ever lived, and erect them into one great heap; but that heap, as compared with one immortal soul, would, in the eye of Heaven, be so much worthless dross. Such being the value of the soul, how infinitely important it is that it should be entrusted to the keeping of one who can preserve it in safety! In the hands of Christ it is secure for ever. What no created being can do for us, Jesus is able to accomplish. His blood can cleanse us, His grace can save us, His arm can protect us. He can pilot us through life's troubled sea, and revive our fainting hearts in the dark night of sorrow. He can deprive the last enemy of its sting, and the grave of its victory. He can take us by the hand as we enter the valley of the shadow of death, lead us in safety through, and open for our reception the gates of Paradise. As we attempt to look over the boundary-line that separates time from eternity, the mind is lost in awe and bewilderment—imagination can only draw a faint outline of the scenes amid which we are to mingle; but with the firm conviction

that our souls are in the hands of Christ, we can anticipate an unknown future with joy and confidence.

As I contemplate the firm faith which characterized the apostle in the prospect of his dissolution, let it be my earnest prayer that his experience may be mine. Let me, like him, commit my soul to the keeping of Christ, assured that there it is safe for time and eternity. As Paul lived with the judgment-day ever in view, so let my thoughts centre on that day, that thus, like him, I may then be found in Christ, and possessed of a title to eternal bliss. With the realities of that day in prospect—with the conviction that I shall then see rocks rending and graves opening, and millions upon millions of human beings assembled before the great white throne, to have their actions weighed in the scale of unerring wisdom, let it be my fervent desire that I may then raise my head in triumph; and while others are calling to the mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, I may be among the number of those to whom He shall address the welcome, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

'Almighty Saviour of mankind!
On Thee my hopes remain;
And when the day of trouble comes,
I shall not trust in vain.

'I know the Power in whom I trust,
The arm on which I lean;
He will my Saviour ever be
Who has my Saviour been.

'Therefore, through life I'll trust in Thee,
In death I will adore;
And after death will sing Thy praise,
When time shall be no more.'—LOGAN.

XLVII.

THE GLORIOUS TRANSFORMATION.

'It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.'—1 JOHN III. 2.

MANKIND naturally desire to look into the future, and know something of the destiny that awaits them after death. As we meditate on the state of existence to which we shall be admitted when we resign our connection with earth, a thousand questions suggest themselves as to the nature of the bliss which, if saved by grace, we shall enjoy. What will be the character of our employment? what the faculties we shall possess? what the amount of knowledge we shall gain? what the relation that shall exist between Jehovah and His glorified people? —are inquiries that frequently arise as our thoughts are directed to the period when faith shall be turned into sight. On all these subjects, however, our ideas, after all the light that is reflected on them by the word of God, are dim and clouded; and the more eagerly we study them, the more we are reminded of the imperfection of our present attainments. Even the sacred writers, inspired though they were by the Holy Spirit, draw but a faint outline of the blissful regions that shall be occupied by the redeemed. Paul, who was caught up to the third heavens, could only say respecting their surpassing glories, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. ii. 9). Peter, whose strong

faith enabled him to realize the glory of heaven as already his by anticipation, could only speak of that glory as yet to be revealed. John, the beloved disciple, who obtained visions of celestial bliss such as have comforted the Church ever since, was constrained to pen the declaration, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.'

Dim and imperfect, however, though our views are of the future abode of the redeemed, many revelations of its bliss are given in the word of God which enable us to form a tangible idea of its nature. As we stand with the word of God in our hand, and look across the boundary-line that separates time from eternity, vivid flashes of light are thrown over the scenery of the celestial state, and give us glimpses of the bliss that is there enjoyed. Thus, in the passage before us, while the apostle tells us in one clause that it doth not yet appear what we shall be, he assures us in the next that we shall see Christ, and the sight will effect in us a resemblance to Him.

'When He shall appear,' says the apostle, 'we shall see Him as He is.' We shall see Him, not as He was seen in the days of His flesh, 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs.' Then the glory of His divinity was veiled beneath the robe of humanity that He assumed. Only a few rays of that resplendent majesty that encircles Him as Deity in the heaven of heavens darted out from His character during His earthly sojourn. In His external appearance, with His face more marred than any man, there was little to mark Him out as the Creator of all worlds and the possessor of infinite power. As He bowed His head and gave up the ghost on the ignominious tree, who, that knew not otherwise of the inherent dignity of His person, would have supposed that He was the source of all vitality, at the call of whose voice all the dead should one day awake to life?

But at His second appearing believers shall see Him as

He is, in all the glories of His divine character. He who lay in the manger at Bethlehem shall then be acknowledged as the eternal Son of God, while the millions of beings who shall stand before Him will own His sway. He who was despised and rejected of men shall then be the adored of angels. On His head He will wear many crowns, while in His hand He shall hold the sceptre of the universe. His humanity, glorified and refined, will serve as a vehicle to portray the lustre and perfection of the divine nature. He will appear as a man—not, however, with His face marred, as in the days of His flesh, but radiant with celestial splendour. Believers shall then see Him as He is—not as now, through the dim medium of faith, but face to face they shall see the King in His beauty. Here below they delight to contemplate the excellences of His character as these are portrayed in His word; joy fills their hearts as they hold fellowship with Him in meditation and prayer; they possess a peace which the world knows not of as they sit at His table and commemorate His dying love. But still, the brightest vision which they now have of the Redeemer is through the grey and misty dawn, as compared with the ravishing view of His glory which they shall obtain when faith gives place to sight, amid the dazzling realities of the resurrection morning.

Christ will be seen at His second coming radiant with majesty and glory; and striking will be the transformation which the vision of Him will effect upon His people. As they lift their long-closed eyes and look upon Him, a change will pass over them—*they shall be like Him.* Even in this world, the view which they obtain of Him with the eye of faith produces in them a resemblance to His character: 'But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord' (2 Cor. iii. 18). The likeness to Christ exhibited by believers

on earth, however, is faint, and marred by sin and imperfection. The resemblance will not be complete till they see Him as He is, when, in presence of an assembled universe, He shall acknowledge them as the purchase of His sufferings.

In what respect will believers bear a resemblance to Christ in the celestial world? They shall be like Him, in the first place, as regards their bodily organization. The Redeemer ascended to heaven in the body which He possessed in the days of His humiliation, and that body He will occupy through eternity, as a visible token of His union to our fallen and guilty race. It exists now, however, and will for ever exist, in a glorified form, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; and therefore, before His entrance into heaven, His humanity must have undergone a great and decided change. His body is not now subject to hunger and thirst, weariness and pain. Excepting the marks of the wounds that were inflicted on it when He hung on the accursed tree, and which will only remain as visible memorials of His conflict and triumph, no trace of His humiliation will appear on it; refined and glorified, it will be the medium through which the splendour of His divine perfections will irradiate the celestial home of the redeemed. Some idea of the glorious transformation which had taken place on the body of the Redeemer at His ascension may be inferred from the impression which the sight of it produced on the beloved disciple when an exile at Patmos. Intimate was the fellowship that had subsisted between John and his Master; he had witnessed His miracles of power, he had listened to the revelation of His doctrines, and he had leaned on His breast at supper. But when the apostle beheld Him in His glory, His head and His hairs white as wool, His eyes as a flame of fire, His feet like unto fine brass, His voice as the sound of many waters, and His countenance as the sun shineth in his strength, he fell at His feet as dead.

Glorious as the body of the Redeemer now is, it is the model after which the resurrection body of His people will be fashioned. On this point we are not left to conjecture. It is the inspired declaration of another apostle, that Christ 'shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself' (Phil. iii. 21). The body which believers have upon earth is corruptible, liable to infirmity and disease; a slight accident may destroy its functions; death at last lays it low, and consigns it to the dust, to become a prey of worms. How often are the energies of the mind clogged and impeded by the affliction and suffering of the bodily tenement which it occupies! But glorious will be the change that shall be wrought on the bodies of believers, when, at the call of the archangel's trumpet, they shall start from the sleep of death. Their eyes shall see the King in His beauty, and as they look upon Him, they shall be assimilated to Him. Amid the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, and shrieks of despair from the impenitent, a blessed transformation shall, in the twinkling of an eye, pass over them, and every form will be a reflection of the radiance that shall sparkle from the person of the glorified Redeemer.

Not only will believers resemble Christ in His physical organization, they shall be like Him in His perfect holiness. No taint of sin will mar the whiteness of the robe which they have washed in His blood. Pure as He Himself is pure, no barrier of guilt or unbelief shall arise to disturb the intimacy of their fellowship with Him. They shall be like Him, also, in the happiness which shall be their portion. He is the great fountain of bliss; and as they dwell in His immediate presence, streams from that fountain will ever flow into their souls, creating a joy which will be akin to His own. Seated with Him on His exalted throne, they shall be sharers with Him in His royal honours.

Animated by the glorious hopes which this subject inspires, let it be my fervent prayer that it may exert its proper influence upon me: 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure' (1 John iii. 3). Am I, on the morning of the resurrection, to see Christ, and obtain a perfect assimilation to His image? Then let me study the excellences of His character now, let me seek to possess a growing resemblance to Him now, so that when I see Him as He is, the holiness of my nature may attest my relation to Him. Here, on earth, I cannot obtain a perfect likeness to Him; not till the dawn of the resurrection morning, when my body shall awake from the sleep of the tomb, shall I gain a complete assimilation to His image. But the work of holiness must ever be advancing in my heart; the graces of the Christian character must be growing in strength and ardour; the spotless innocence of the Redeemer must find in me more and more its counterpart. As my present vile body is to be fashioned into a resemblance to Christ's glorified body, let it be my desire that all its powers may be consecrated to the divine glory and service. With the prospect of this corruptible putting on incorruption, let me rise above the fear of death and the grave. My dust, if I die united to Christ, will be precious in His sight; He will watch over it till, at the call of His all-powerful voice, it shall start into life, to put on a new and glorified form, and thus be fitted for entrance into the house not made with hands, the house eternal in the heavens.

'What must it be to dwell above
  At God's right hand, where Jesus reigns,
Since the sweet earnest of His love
  O'erwhelms us on these dreary plains!
No heart can think, no tongue explain,
What bliss it is with Christ to reign.

'When sin no more obstructs our sight,
When sorrow pains our heart no more,
How shall we view the Prince of Light,
And all His works of grace explore!
What heights and depths of love divine
Will there through endless ages shine!'

SWAIN.

XLVIII.

VICTORY AND REWARD.

'To Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.'—REV. III. 21.

THE design of Christ in this passage is to encourage the believer to diligence in his efforts to overcome temptation, by the prospect of the exalted honour that awaits him in the celestial world. The words imply that he is engaged in a conflict which requires the exercise of courage and fortitude. Scripture uniformly represents the path of the Christian as beset with manifold dangers, and it employs various similitudes to exhibit the difficulties through which he has to pass. Sometimes his career is spoken of as a race-course, in which he is required to part with every sinful pleasure which would obstruct his spiritual progress, and press on with vigour till he has reached the goal and won the prize. He is also represented as in a battle-field, having arrayed against him a host of formidable enemies, to resist whose attacks the utmost firmness and vigilance are needed. Hence it is that the word of God abounds with exhortations to believers to be stedfast in their Christian profession. They are reminded that *they wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* In view of the position of danger which they occupy, they are told to *take unto them the whole armour of God, that they may be*

able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Their enemies are classed under the threefold division of the world, the devil, and the flesh.

The world is one foe to the believer. It manifests its antagonism in a variety of forms. In many ages of the Church's history, all the schemes which the malice of wicked men could invent were directed against the followers of Jesus. To be a Christian was, in other words, to be the prey of merciless and cruel tyrants. The disciples of the crucified Nazarene had to encounter all the fiery trials of persecution. Brought before the rulers of the world, they had to choose between the dread alternatives of life and death—enjoying the society of their friends, or submitting to penury and the most bitter privations.

Christians, at the present day, are seldom exposed to the same severe trials. *Under their vine and fig-tree they can sit, none daring to make them afraid.* But still much evil influence is to be dreaded from the snares and sinful pleasures of the world, though the times of persecution have passed away. With sin we must wage an unceasing conflict. The very place of the Christian's residence becomes the occasion of his danger. The world is still, what it always has been, an enemy to religion. What pierces men through with many sorrows, and drowns them at last in perdition? The world. What makes them indifferent to the concerns of eternity and the interests of their immortal souls? What but the cares, the business, and the principles of the world?

Another source of temptation to the believer arises from the efforts of Satan to subvert his faith. While the devil is the great enemy of mankind in general, and aims at their destruction by lulling the consciences of the wicked, that no convictions of sin may awaken them to a concern about their interests for eternity, his most powerful energies are directed against the disciples of the Lord Jesus. So

soon as the sinner is aroused to a sense of guilt, renounces the pleasures of the world, and repairs to the cross, to find peace through the merit of Emmanuel's blood, it is then that the Prince of Darkness begins his most subtle attempts to perplex and harass his mind, or sink him into final despair. So long as the believer is on this side of time, he will find his path to glory thickly set with the snares of the wicked one. There is not a desire after holiness he can cherish but Satan will seek to quench—not a holy resolution he can form but his great enemy will attempt to weaken and destroy. Even in the hour of dissolution, when he bids farewell to all he holds dear on earth, the devil plies his most potent attacks to disturb the serenity of his mind. As the manslayer in the old dispensation was only safe from the arm of the avenger of blood when he was within the gate of the city of refuge, so the believer is only secure from the attacks of the wicked one when he stands acquitted at the bar of God's judgment, and his ear is greeted with the welcome, '*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*'

Another source of temptation to the disciple of Christ arises from the corruptions of his own sinful nature. Man, in his thoughts, feelings, and affections, is by nature at enmity with God, and it is only by the influences of the Divine Spirit that the will is renewed and evil propensities are overcome. But even in the believer, whose heart is gradually sanctified by the operations of divine grace, there are many remains of natural corruption, and the most difficult part of the Christian's warfare is to keep these in subjection. Throughout the whole of his earthly career, sin will be found retarding his growth in holiness; and never till he has crossed the Jordan of death, and entered upon his eternal reward, will he be altogether freed from its power. Against sin in every form he must wage perpetual war, subduing every lust, quenching every unholy

desire, and striving to have all the powers of his nature consecrated to the service of the Redeemer.

Numerous and powerful though the enemies of the believer are, he will, if he relies on the almighty arm of the Captain of his salvation, gain a victory over them. All who engage in the Christian warfare do not overcome. Many who set out on the Christian pilgrimage, alarmed at the prospect of the difficulties which they are likely to encounter, turn back, and afresh give themselves up to the pleasures of sin and the service of the world. But it is not so with the genuine followers of Christ. They fight manfully under the banner of their Leader, and at last come off victorious. Could we, at this hour, draw aside the veil which hides heaven from our view, we should behold millions of glorified ones, who on earth had to struggle with sin and imperfection, but who, under the guidance of their great Forerunner, were brought in safety to their eternal home, where, as the adopted sons of the Almighty, they bask in His favour and enjoy His fellowship.

The Christian who seeks to overcome his spiritual enemies must possess certain qualifications. He must enter the field of conflict furnished with the weapon of faith. 'This,' says the apostle, 'is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' The Christian religion may be described as a struggle between sense and faith. It is by the exercise of this principle that the believer advances in holiness and conformity to the divine image. It is faith that assigns to things seen and temporal their true value. Beheld with the glass of faith, the wealth and fascination of time lose much of their glare and importance. The rainbow seems to the child, at one time, a vast and stable arch, but a few moments afterwards the illusion is dispelled, by the disappearance of the beautiful object from the heavens. Similar is the experience of the believer as

he contemplates through the medium of faith the fleeting vanities of earth. Like a dissolving view, the fashion of the world is seen passing away.

With equal distinctness does faith place before the eye of the believer the realities of the celestial world. It unfolds to his view regions of unclouded bliss, where the sins and sorrows of earth are unknown. As the telescope of faith is directed to the mansions of the redeemed, what enrapturing scenes pass before the gaze of the beholder! Seated on a throne of majesty, and having on His head many crowns, is the Great High Priest of His people, and invested with almighty power to further their eternal welfare. Around Him are the myriads of angels, reflecting His glory, and ever ready to obey His high behests. There are *the spirits of the just made perfect*, occupying the positions of honour which have been purchased and provided for them. The happiness enjoyed in those celestial regions is refined and elevated in its nature, and directly emanating from God Himself, the great fountain of bliss. The believer looks forward to the consummation of all things earthly; and as he contemplates the great white throne erected, Jesus, the Judge of all, seated on that throne, and the actions of time weighed in the balances of unerring justice, how mean and worthless do worldly pleasures appear in his view, and with what energy is he endowed to battle with the temptations that surround him! Faith is one of the weapons with which he is enabled to overcome all his spiritual enemies.

Living in the exercise of faith, and deriving strength from the almighty arm of his Redeemer, who has engaged to bless and defend him in all his conflicts, the believer will assuredly come off victorious. Having conquered all his spiritual enemies, a rich and glorious reward will be conferred upon him at the hour of death. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even

as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.' There seems here a reference to a custom which prevailed in ancient warfare. After a battle, the general of a victorious army seated himself on a throne, and invited, as a token of honour, some soldier who had distinguished himself by his valour to sit beside him. Christ has conquered all His enemies, and, as a mark of the exalted dignity to which He is raised, is represented as seated with His Father on His throne. In like manner, the faithful Christian who triumphs over his spiritual foes shall, at the termination of his conflict, sit by the side of the Captain of his salvation on His heavenly throne.

The language which is here employed to describe the felicity to which the believer shall be exalted in a future world is figurative, but striking and expressive. It implies that the highest honours of heaven shall be conferred upon him: a crown of life shall be his prize; the throne of the Redeemer shall be his seat; the presence of God shall be the fulness of his joy and his pleasures for evermore. Blessed shall be the day in the believer's history when he shall lay down his spiritual armour, and find himself invested with all the honours which the Saviour shall bestow as the reward of his fidelity. Sitting with Christ upon His throne, the holiness of the divine nature will be reflected in him; and happiness, pure and perfect in its nature, shall be dealt out to him from the infinite source of love and bliss. Dwelling in the immediate presence of his Redeemer, and admitted to intimate fellowship with Him, he shall discover, in all their resplendent lustre, the glories of His character, which on earth he saw but dimly through the glass of faith. His conflict may have been severe, but he has won a glorious prize. A few years comprehended the period of his warfare, but an eternity of bliss is the reward that shall be meted out to him.

Let the views that have been presented of the glories that await the believer in the world of bliss stimulate me to increasing courage in contending with my spiritual foes. The battle with sin and Satan which I am called to wage may be trying and severe, but I fight for no mean reward,—a place on Christ's throne—a crown that shall never lose its lustre—an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Let me, then, gird on my spiritual armour, and keep my eye steadily fixed on my victorious Captain, who, as the Forerunner, has entered heaven before me. Let me ever draw encouragement from the thought that His fidelity is pledged to secure my eternal salvation, whatever perils may befall me. My conflict with sin may be severe; but if, through grace, I overcome, glorious is the reward that shall succeed it. If possessed of a living faith in Emmanuel's sacrifice, even death, the last enemy, will be a friend, and the messenger that shall summon me to heaven's imperishable glories. Now I can see the Saviour but dimly with the eye of faith; let me be stedfast in my attachment to His cause, and ere long I shall see Him as He is, in all His matchless beauty, and hear Him inviting me to sit with Him on His exalted throne.

'Oh for the wings of faith, to rise
Within the veil, and see
The saints above, how great their joys,
How bright their glories be!

'Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears;
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears.

'We ask them whence their vict'ry came;
They, with united breath,

Ascribe their conquests to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death.

'They marked the footsteps that He trod;
His zeal inspired their breast;
And, following their incarnate God,
Possess the promised rest.'

XLIX.

RESEMBLANCE TO CHRIST A PREPARATION FOR HEAVEN.

'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'—2 COR. III. 18.

THERE are two sources whence man derives his knowledge of the divine character: one is the volume of nature; the other is the volume of revelation. From the former of these, information is obtained respecting what are termed the natural attributes of God. The works of external nature furnish numerous illustrations of the power, wisdom, and goodness of their great Author. So unmistakeably do the varied objects in creation proclaim the existence and perfections of the 'Almighty, that even the heathen, who ascribe homage to idols of their own formation, are without excuse.

The light, however, which is reflected from the page of nature on the character and perfections of God, is dim as compared with the resplendent lustre that is shed on them by the teachings of the inspired volume. While from the works of creation mankind are left to infer certain truths respecting their Author, Scripture abounds with plain and direct assertion. Not only does revelation confirm all that nature intimates regarding God, but it makes known attributes in His character whose existence unassisted reason could not have discovered. The grand peculiarity of the Bible, however, is that it places before the eyes of man-

kind a visible embodiment of divinity in the person of Christ. He is the burden of Old Testament prophecy, the theme of gospel narrative, and the grand centre around whom all the doctrines propounded by the apostles revolve. While the great design of His incarnation was to atone for the guilt of a fallen world, He at the same time exhibited a character of such excellence, that mankind, by the contemplation of it, and when that is accompanied by the influences of the Holy Spirit, are gradually transformed into a resemblance to it. In the gospel, the believer sees the glory of Christ shining as in a mirror. As he beholds that glory, a change passes over him; he reflects the image of the Redeemer, and he is thus fitted for the immediate fellowship which he shall enjoy with Him in the realms of bliss.

Christians, when their minds are not blinded by unbelief, see the glory of Christ as exhibited during His earthly sojourn. They see the glory of His incarnation, when, in order to carry out the great work of human redemption, He assumed the nature of man. They see the glory of His miracles, when, to illustrate His power and love, disease and death were subject to His commands. They see the glory of His doctrines, when He opened the treasures of His wisdom to enlighten the darkened soul of man. They see the glory of His sufferings, when He stood in their room, and endured the penalty that was due to their guilt. They see the glory of His death, when He hung on the accursed tree, and shed His precious blood to purchase eternal happiness for them. They see the glory of His resurrection, when, in the exercise of divine and almighty power, He burst asunder the barriers of the tomb, and thus proclaimed Himself the conqueror of death. They see His glory in His ascension, when, after completing the work which was assigned Him, He returned to the mansions of glory, there to make intercession for them. Christians

contemplate these events in the life of the Redeemer as made known in the Gospels; and these events, with the light shed upon them by the Holy Spirit, manifest His glory. They see in Him One who exhibited every virtue that can adorn humanity, and who, though exposed to every temptation common to man, was never guilty of a single sin.

Besides the human glory of Christ, believers see His divine glory in the mirror of His word. As one of the persons of the Godhead, they see Him possessed of infinite perfection. They see Him as the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. They see Him as the eternal God, who enjoyed fellowship with the Father before sun or planet started into existence. They see Him as the immutable God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. They see Him as the mighty God, whose power created and sustains the fabric of the universe. They see Him as the omniscient God, whose knowledge has no limit, and extends to the most secret thoughts of His rational creatures. They see Him as the omnipresent God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. What a rich treasure of glory is thus exhibited in the gospel as belonging to Christ! Every attribute of His character has the seal of divinity upon it. The throne on which He sits is the throne of God; the crown He wears is the crown of God; the sceptre He wields is the sceptre of God. The rays of His divine majesty dazzle and overpower mortals with their splendour. Glorified saints in heaven are represented, in view of His glory, as casting their crowns at His feet when they approach His presence.

All this glory which centres in Christ, believers perceive in the mirror of His word. They see it with open and unveiled face. There was a time when their own inward corruption, the pride and self-righteousness of their hearts, the temptations and sinful pleasures of the world, hindered

them from seeing the glory of Christ. But the veil has been removed, and now they see the glory of Emmanuel shining in the mirror of the gospel. The best, it is true, see through a glass darkly, and the spiritual vision of all is not equally strong. All have not the exalted visions of the divine glory which were possessed by Moses on the mount, or Paul in the third heavens. But there is not a believer, however weak his faith, who does not discover traces of the glory of Christ in the mirror of His word,—glimpses which are the earnest of the ravishing view that will be obtained when the soul, freed from its connection with the body, shall be admitted to His immediate presence, amid the eternal realities of heaven.

What is the effect upon the believer of the view that he thus obtains of the glory of Christ in the Bible? He is changed into the same image, from glory to glory. Just as a person, when he takes his stand on a cloudless day by the bank of a clear and unruffled lake, has the brightness of the sun reflected from the glassy surface on his countenance, so the apostle here says, that as we look upon the glory of Christ as exhibited in His word, that glory shining upon us transforms us into His image. By contemplating the excellences of His character, we come to resemble them. There are, indeed, glories in Christ's nature which we cannot imitate. Never shall we be like Him in the extent of His power and wisdom, the immensity of His being, or the immutability of His perfections. But we may obtain a likeness to the virtues which adorned His human character during His earthly life. His purity, temperance, and fortitude may all be reflected in our conduct. The loving and benevolent disposition which He exhibited when He went about doing good, relieving misery and promoting happiness, may be imbibed and manifested by us when we contemplate His glory in the mirror of His word.

This resemblance to the character of Christ is not

produced in the believer at once. He is *changed into the same image, from glory to glory.* Progress in holiness is an essential principle in the religion of Christ. The true believer goes from strength to strength. His path through the world is beautifully likened to the sun, from his rise in the morning till the hour that he reaches meridian splendour. *He shines more and more unto the perfect day.* From the moment that the Holy Spirit begins the work of grace in his heart, he undergoes a gradual transformation, till the image of the Redeemer shines out in his conduct.

If such is the effect which a view of Christ's glory, accompanied with the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God, produces on the character of the believer on earth, what a transforming influence must that glory exert when it is seen amid the sinless bliss of the celestial world! There He is beheld not dimly with the eye of faith, but face to face, and in all the splendours of His divine majesty. The believer, indeed, though compassed with the imperfections of earth, perceives a glory in Christ's character which is hid from the gaze of those who are strangers to the power of divine grace. *They* see Him as a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness. But the veil of unbelief has been drawn aside from the eye of the Christian, and he sees the glory of Emmanuel with open face. Still it is only as in a glass that this glory is now beheld. It has been ascertained from recent discoveries that glass was in existence in the time of the apostle, but it was dim and obscure as compared with that now in use. Through this substance, objects were seen feebly and indistinctly. The apostle may have had such glass in view when he penned this passage; and the idea conveyed is, that however transforming may be the effect of Christ's glory as seen by the believer on earth, the view is feeble as compared with that which shall be obtained when faith will give place to sight. As the vision of the

Redeemer's glory vouchsafed to the Christian now is imperfect, so is the change which is wrought in him. Never will he be altogether like Christ till he sees Him as He is, amid the hallelujahs of the celestial world. Dwelling in His immediate presence, His glory reflected on him will change him into the same image. Whether the Holy Spirit will continue His operations on the character of the saint after he is admitted to heaven, is a point on which Scripture is silent. His holiness in the world of bliss, though perfect, will admit of degrees; and it may be that the Divine Agent who first implanted the seeds of grace in his soul shall still carry on His work, and bring out in greater fulness those lineaments of character which will assimilate him more closely to the image of Christ.

If such be the transforming influence of the view of Christ's glory on the believer, let me make His character more earnestly my study. The person and work of Christ are set before me in the gospel; there, as in a mirror, I am permitted to look upon them. Let my prayer be, that as I look a change may pass over me. Let me not rest satisfied with a faint resemblance to Christ. Let me be animated with the fervent desire that I may be changed from glory to glory. Let my motto be, Go forward in the divine life. Let me guard against the delusion, that if I am once in a state of grace I am safe, whatever be the character of my conduct. Let me examine the validity of my title to heaven in the light of my fitness for its enjoyments. Thus may I grow in likeness to Christ, until my ransomed spirit shall be admitted to the world of bliss, where I shall not only see His glory, but His person, and enjoy immediate fellowship with Him.

'My gracious Saviour, and my Lord!
I read my duty in Thy word;
But in Thy life the law appears
Drawn out in living characters.

'Thy truth, Thy patience, and Thy zeal;
Thy pleasure in my Father's will;
Thy love and meekness—so divine!
I would transcribe, and make them mine.

'Be Thou my pattern! make me bear
More of Thy gracious image here;
Then God, the Judge, shall own my name
Among the followers of the Lamb.'—WATTS.

L.

THE DEAD IN CHRIST BLESSED.

'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.'—REV. XIV. 13.

HOW very different are the feelings with which the unbeliever and the Christian contemplate death! The one views it with dread; the other hails it as a friend. While, through fear of it, mankind are all their lifetime subject to bondage, the believer, looking at it through the glass of faith, sees it stripped of its terrors. While the word of God unfolds the realities of the eternal world, it at the same time makes known the way whereby the glories of that world may be secured. Christ has brought life and immortality to light by His gospel. He has given the assurance that the possession of faith in His sacrifice will secure admission to everlasting bliss; and Scripture clearly intimates that the hour of the Christian's death is the hour of his entrance into that bliss. Thus it is that the believer, however strong may be his attachments to earth and time, looks forward with calmness and composure to the approach of death, as the instrument that shall conduct him to unending happiness. If friends in Christ have crossed the Jordan before him, he mourns not for them as those who have no hope, but rests assured that they are tasting of the fulness of joy which is at God's right hand, and that before long he shall be a companion with them in their bliss.

From the connection of this passage with the preceding verse, it is evident that it bears a primary reference to the

death of those who had sealed their testimony to Christ and His cause by their blood. These Christian martyrs died in the Lord, and death was to them a blessing, as it removed them from a world of suffering, and admitted them to the rewards of eternity. No longer should they be exposed to the rage of persecution; no longer should they suffer from the scorn and hatred of the world, but, like a vessel that, after sailing stormy seas, has reached the destined port uninjured, they had gained the haven of eternal peace. The passage, though in its primary reference it is a description of the state of those who died the martyr's death, has a much wider application, and may be affirmed of the latter end of believers in all times. All the saints in Christ Jesus, who look forward to heaven as their everlasting home, feel that the present life is a warfare, in which they are beset with dangers manifold, so that when they bid adieu to earth and breathe their last, it may be affirmed respecting them that they are blessed.

The description here given of departed believers is that they died in the Lord. This implies that they died in a state of union to Christ. By nature, and on account of sin, they were once far off, and strangers to the blessings of His grace; but by the blood of the cross they were brought nigh, and embraced in the covenant which Jesus has established between Himself and His people. That such a union exists betwixt Him and His believing children is evident from many representations in the word of God. He is spoken of as dwelling in them by His Spirit, while they are said to dwell in Him by faith. Various figures are employed in Scripture to intimate the closeness of this connection. It is compared to the union between the vine and the branches, the foundation and the superstructure, the head and the members. It is with reference to this union that the apostle speaks when he says, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but

Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' Such is the union that is formed betwixt Christ and His people when He takes possession of their hearts by His grace, and enables them to accept of the blessings of His salvation. It is a union which remains unshaken amid the vicissitudes of time; which the powers of earth and hell cannot sever; which the last enemy itself will not dissolve; and which will increase in closeness and intimacy as age succeeds age in the cycles of eternity. Death, therefore, though it is an event fraught with the most momentous consequences to the believer, makes no change in the relation that subsists betwixt him and the Redeemer. Living or dying, he is the Lord's; and even his body, though it moulders in the noisome grave, is still united to Christ, and will be watched over till the morning of the resurrection, when it shall be raised incorruptible, and fashioned to a resemblance to His own glorified body.

For the Christian, then, to die in the Lord, is to die in a state of union to His person. It is to die pardoned, justified, and accepted in the sight of God. It is to die with the comforting assurance that the robe of Christ's righteousness, which covers him, will shield him from the storms of the divine wrath, and secure for him a passport to the regions of eternal joy.

Believers dying in the Lord are blessed, as, in virtue of their union to Him, they at once gain an entrance into the unclouded glory of the celestial world. No charge is preferred against them as they stand at the judgment-bar of Jehovah, for, covered with the robe of their Redeemer's righteousness, He sees no iniquity in them. The gates of heaven open for their admission; angels, who are to be their companions through eternal ages, hail with songs of rapture their entrance to the ranks of their holy society;

while the Saviour Himself, with a countenance radiant with divine glory, will welcome them to the joys of His presence.

The elements that compose the blessedness of the redeemed in glory are many; but, surrounded as we are by the darkness and unbelief of earth, any idea that we can now form of their happiness must be dim and imperfect. As they are welcomed to the heavenly mansions, the contrast that presents itself between their present and former condition will of itself be a source of exalted happiness. If a person, saved from the horrors of shipwreck, and landed in safety amid the comforts of home, experiences an indescribable sensation of delight, what joy will fill the soul of the glorified believer, when, after passing through the trials of earth, he takes his place among the ranks of the redeemed, and joins with them in their holy employments! One object of the Almighty in permitting sorrows and tribulations to enter the lot of His people, as they pursue their pilgrimage through this world, is not only to qualify them for the services and rewards of heaven, but doubtless also that the recollection of the troubles of their earthly state may heighten their eternal joys. The picture of bliss on which they gaze will stand out in brighter colours by the remembrance, which appears in the background, of bodily pain or mental anguish. The enlarged knowledge which the redeemed in glory shall obtain of the truths dimly unfolded in revelation, and which on earth they imperfectly understood, will be an essential element in their bliss. One hour of heaven will impart to them more correct views of the divine character and the worth of salvation than they obtained here below by years of study and research. As they discourse with the Redeemer face to face, and walk on the banks of the river of life, with angels as their companions, how clearly will they comprehend the design of the Almighty in many of His dispensa-

tions which were formerly enveloped in mystery! With their natures made perfectly holy, with the polluting influence of sin unknown, and endowed with capacities which fit them for endless and increasing enjoyment, they shall then realize the character of that bliss to which death is the entrance.

How consoling to the believer is the truth that death to him will be the introduction to eternal glory! Let it be my fervent prayer that I may be united to Christ by faith, so that, dying in Him, I may be admitted to the joys of His immediate presence, where I shall see Him as He is, and bask in the sunshine of His love. That I may overcome the fear of the last enemy, through which many are all their lifetime subject to bondage, let me often contemplate the bliss that lies beyond the dark valley, and prepare with diligence for the hour of my departure. Let the prospect of the happiness that awaits the righteous when they terminate their earthly career stimulate me to set my affections on those things that are above. Then, when death comes, it will be a welcome messenger, to open the door from a world of sin to my Father's house of many mansions, where, amid unclouded glory, I shall reflect the Redeemer's image, and enjoy uninterrupted fellowship with Him.

'Angel-voices sweetly singing,
Echoes through the blue dome ringing,
News of wondrous gladness bringing;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

'Now beneath us all the grieving,
All the wounded spirit's heaving,
All the woe of hopes deceiving;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

'Sin for ever left behind us,
Earthly visions cease to blind us,
Fleshly fetters cease to bind us;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!'—BONAR.

LI.

HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

'Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.'—COL. III. 2.

IF we look around us in the world, we see that men of every grade and class are engaged in the pursuit of some object. The powers and energies of their minds are devoted to the attainment of some real or supposed advantage. The merchant, for example, spends anxious days and nights to amass stores of riches. Early and late, he is bargaining and getting gain, that he and his family may live in elegance and luxury. The miser is ever anxious to increase his silver and gold; he will even hazard distant voyages, and, on the shores of some foreign land, dig deep in the bowels of the earth, that he may return to his native country laden with additional stores of that on which all the affections of his heart are set. The votary of pleasure is ever eager to catch at new sources of enjoyment, and his health and substance are sacrificed that he may revel in the cup of mirth and folly. The ambitious man will undergo any toils and hardships, that his fame may be emblazoned before the eyes of his fellow-men, and that his name may descend with honour to a late posterity.

Now, when we look at the avidity with which mankind pursue the objects on which their hearts are set, we might almost be tempted to conclude that they were for ever to live in the enjoyment of this world's blessings, or, at all

events, that the present life comprised the whole span of their existence. But stern facts proclaim that the event is far otherwise. After man has spent a few years of toil and hardship, death lays his hand upon him, and closes his eyes on all that he holds dear on earth; and, from the testimony of revelation, we learn that he then enters on a condition of endless bliss or woe. Into the unknown regions that lie beyond the boundaries of time, he can neither carry with him wealth, nor property, nor fame—all must be left behind. When all mankind are thus destined to be the victims of death, how surprising it is that they should be so much engrossed with the perishing things of time and sense, and so little influenced by the solemn realities of the world to come! When we place the fleeting nature of all earthly projects in contrast with the exceeding weight of glory that awaits the righteous, we might suppose that multitudes would inquire the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. But, alas! even among believers, who profess to have their hopes set on heaven, earthly things so frequently absorb their attention, as to exclude all concern about eternal realities.

The exhortation, therefore, 'Set your affections on things above,' is one at all times appropriate to believers, surrounded as they are by the fascinations and allurements of earth. By 'things above' we are to understand all the elements that go to make up the bliss of the celestial world. The phrase comprehends fellowship with the Saviour, the companionship of angels, converse with glorified saints, the crowns of life and the robes of righteousness that shall be conferred upon the redeemed. Are not such objects worthy the attention and regard of those who expect before long to enter on the possession of them? Placed in contrast with the things of earth, how transcendently glorious do they appear! *Fading* and *transitory* are the terms which correctly describe the nature of all worldly treasures.

A man may toil for years to amass a fortune, and, even if he succeeds in his object, some failure in trade may hurl him from the heights of affluence to the depths of poverty. Instances are on record in which the millionaire of one year has been a beggar the next. Warriors have waded through seas of blood to gain positions of honour in the eyes of their fellow-men, and, just as they reached the fame which they so eagerly sought, some deadly disease has numbered them among its victims and consigned them to the dust. The proud monarch, who is surrounded by every luxury which wealth can furnish, and whose word is law to the millions of his subjects, must one day lay aside his sceptre at the summons of the last enemy, and be laid a lifeless corpse in the narrow house appointed for all living. Empires, such as those of Assyria and Rome, which once exercised sway over a large portion of the earth, have passed away like a dream of the night. Cities, renowned in ancient times for the beauty of their architecture, have long since crumbled into ruins, and perhaps a few shattered columns are all that remain to point out the site of former magnificence. Daily experience teaches the transitory and uncertain nature of all earthly possessions. Let a man contemplate the history of his own life, from infancy up to manhood, and how many sad memorials of change and mortality does he see strewed along the path that he has trod! Many who were the companions of his childhood are numbered among the congregation of the dead; while others, who looked forward to the future full of eagerness and hope, have had to maintain a constant struggle with care and misfortune.

While the things of earth are thus so transitory in their nature, why should they so engross the affections of believers? It is true that, during the years of their pilgrimage, the affairs of time must, to a certain extent, occupy their attention. While the Bible tells us to be fervent in spirit,

serving the Lord, it at the same time enjoins us not to be slothful in business. Industry in the pursuits of the present life is in no way incompatible with diligence of preparation for the life to come. The religion of Christ allows its votaries every fair and legitimate means to increase their worldly substance, and rise to positions of honour and respectability among their fellow-men. But what it condemns is an undue measure of attention to the things of earth and time, while things unseen and eternal are neglected and disregarded. It demands that the realities of eternity claim preference over the fleeting vanities of the few years that limit the duration of our earthly sojourn. While the happiness of this world is, under the most favourable circumstances, unsatisfying in its nature and uncertain as to its continuance, the felicity of the celestial world is a reflection of the bliss of Jehovah, who is the great fountain of peace, and destined, like Himself, to be eternal in its duration. There the joys to which the redeemed at the hour of death are admitted will not only suffer no diminution, but be found to be ever on the increase. The highest honours of earth are not once to be named with the princely honours that shall be conferred on the followers of the Redeemer. They shall dwell in His immediate presence, and their fellowship with Him shall be close and intimate. He shall open up the stores of His wisdom to their glorified vision; and, as the result of their converse with Him, they shall make advances in knowledge compared with which the highest attainments of earthly science will be as dust in the balance. As they study the character and works of God, angels will be their fellow-students, revealing to them fresh wonders in the great circle of truth. They shall meet with the illustrious of every age and clime; and as they recount with them the varied incidents of their earthly experience, they shall discover new proofs of the divine

wisdom and faithfulness. With their cup of joy full to the brim, and into which no ingredient of sorrow or disappointment shall ever enter, how exalted will be their positions of bliss! When such are the prospects that stretch out before believers, how strong and powerful are the motives which should induce them to set their affections on things above! Why should earth engross their attention, when they must soon bid farewell to all that they hold dear on it, and mansions of unclouded glory beyond the grave are in readiness for them?

Let the maxim, 'Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth,' exert its due influence upon me. How apt I am to allow my thoughts to be occupied only with the fleeting vanities of time and sense, while the great concerns of eternity are neglected! Let me realize the fact that I am an immortal being, that the spiritual principle within me will never die, and that before long the scenes of the eternal world will burst upon my vision. That heaven may engage my affections, let me often contrast its glories with the transitory nature of all things earthly. Let me bear in mind, that while things seen are temporal, things unseen are eternal. Let me picture to my mind the comparative estimate which I shall form of time and eternity when my dying hour has come. How vain and worthless will all the possessions of earth then appear, and of what infinite value will a title to everlasting bliss be then found! As a pilgrim fast journeying to the grave, let my hopes centre on heaven, whose bliss, if indeed I am an heir of God, I shall soon realize.

'Heavenward stretch, my soul, thy wings,
Heavenly nature canst thou claim;
There is nought of earthly things
Worthy to be all thine aim;
Every soul that God inspires,
Back to Him, its source, aspires.

'Heavenward! faith discerns the prize
That is waiting us afar,
And my heart would swiftly rise,
High o'er sun and moon and star,
To that light behind the veil
Where all earthly splendours pale.'

Lyra Germanica.

LII.

DEATH THE INTRODUCTION TO GLORY.

'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.'—HEB. IX. 27.

THAT *it is appointed unto men once to die* is a proposition which no lengthened argument is needed to establish. Infidels may doubt the existence of a future state; they may laugh at the idea of a heaven or hell; they may mock at religion, and represent the Bible as a cunningly-devised fable; but no man, however sunk in vice or sceptical in his views on other matters he may be, can deny that his present life shall soon be extinct, and his frail body return to its kindred dust. Go into what country we will, and we shall find the inhabitants of that country, whether savage or civilised, ignorant or learned, ready to admit the fact that, sooner or later, all must bow before the stroke of death. From the period that sin entered our world, the last enemy has been busy, sweeping generation after generation to the tomb. Warriors renowned for their deeds of valour, philosophers famous for their wisdom, poets illustrious for their song, preachers distinguished for the eloquence and zeal with which they declared their Lord's message,—all have succumbed at the approach of the grim messenger.

When death is so certain, when it is an event which we can by no possibility avert, how desirable it is that we should frequently contemplate it, and prepare with diligence for its approach! For what makes our dissolution impor-

tant is, that as soon as it takes place, as soon as our souls are separated from our bodies, we are ushered into the presence of our Creator and Judge. That man immediately after death appears before God; that according to the character which he sustains on earth will his eternal destiny be decided; that he at once becomes a participant of the joys of heaven, or is consigned to the regions of everlasting despair,—are truths which accord with the whole tenor of Scripture. In speaking of this subject, the inspired writers exhibit no appearance of doubt or uncertainty, but give forth their views with the utmost confidence and decision.

Some theologians have held the opinion that the soul at the hour of death is plunged into a sleep, a state of unconsciousness, and that in this condition it will continue till the morning of the resurrection, when it shall awake, to be re-united to the body from which it has long been separated. According to this view, man is not judged at the hour of death, but all judgment is deferred till the last day, —the day when Christ shall appear in glory, to decide the destinies of the millions who shall appear before Him. But this dogma has not even the shadow of a scriptural argument on which to rest. The inspired writers always represent the soul at the hour of death as departing from the body, either to a state of bliss or a state of woe. Solomon, for example, speaks of *the dust returning to the earth as it was, and the spirit to the God who gave it.* Christ, by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, clearly taught that the soul is not consigned to a state of unconsciousness after death, but that heaven to the righteous and hell to the wicked are the portion of mankind immediately after dissolution. When Stephen offered the petition, '*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,*' he evidently expected that the instant after death he should be in the presence of his Saviour. And Paul, in many passages of his epistles, distinctly avers that the soul does not cease to be in a state of conscious-

ness when death deprives the body of life; 'for we know,' says he, 'that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' There he declares that the entrance into the heavenly house immediately succeeds the removal from the earthly.

The grand and important truth, then, which the Bible unfolds is, that after death comes the judgment. The soul at once appears in the presence of its God. The actions of the life are weighed in the scales of infinite wisdom. Every word that has been spoken—every deed, however secret, that has been committed—every thought, whether of a pure or impure character, that has lodged in the mind, shall be brought to light. While the faith of the righteous, with the holy life that flowed from it, will be commended, the actions of the wicked will appear in all their naked depravity. The infidel shall then confront that God whose very existence he denied. The thief, who imagined that no eye saw him when, under the cover of night, he plundered his fellow-men of their property, shall then find that the eye of the omniscient God had been resting upon him. The sensualist shall then see his polluted thoughts and deeds held up in the light of divine purity. The man who was acquainted with the gospel, but despised its offer, shall then find himself for ever beyond the reach of mercy.

While the wicked, after judgment, depart to the regions of darkness and despair, the righteous are at once conveyed to the mansions of bliss that have been prepared for them. Death, to believers, is thus the introduction to glory. One moment they are surrounded with the sorrows and infirmities of earth; the next, they are at the judgment-bar of the Almighty, where the sentence of acquittal pronounced upon them is the signal for their admission to the realms of eternal bliss. How sudden and glorious is the transition which they thus experience! One hour they are endeavour-

ing, through a thick mist of doubts and fears, to fix the eye of faith on the Redeemer; the next, they are looking upon Him in all the beauty of His person. They shall then dwell in His immediate presence, and drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at His right hand. In what way their souls, without the presence of their bodies, will be capable of thought and enjoyment, is a point on which, in our present state, we may speculate, but on which we can arrive at no satisfactory conclusions. We know, however, that there is another class of beings in heaven who are purely spiritual, and who think and act without the possession of bodily powers: these are the angels, who, from the hour of their creation, have served God with unwearied activity. We can therefore understand how the soul of man, when separated from the body, should think and feel, and be capable of glorifying and praising God, amid the enjoyments of heaven. For anything we now know, new faculties may be imparted to the mind, and faculties which are now all but dormant may then be called into the most lively exercise. Dwelling in the immediate presence of God, the souls of His people will continue to increase in happiness till the morning of the resurrection, when they shall receive an accession to their bliss by re-union to their bodies, which shall then be raised spiritual and incorruptible.

In view of death and judgment,—two momentous events in my history through which I must soon pass,—let me awake to a true concern about my eternal welfare. Every day that passes over my head is bringing me nearer to my everlasting destiny. How should the monuments of human mortality that so thickly surround me urge me to make diligent preparation for the approach of death, which shall usher me into the immediate presence of an omniscient God! Let me realize for a moment the solemn position which I shall then occupy. Unerring justice shall

decide upon the character of the actions of my life. In view of the searching investigation which shall then be instituted, let me seek to make my calling and election sure. Let my prayer be, that I may be covered with the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, so that God may see no iniquity in me, and that an abundant entrance may be ministered unto me into His everlasting kingdom.

'Lord Jesus! help me now to flee,
And seek my hope alone in Thee;
Apply Thy blood, Thy Spirit give,
Subdue my sin, and let me live.

'Then, when the solemn bell I hear,
If saved from guilt, I need not fear;
Nor would the thought distressing be,
Perhaps it next may toll for me.

'Rather my spirit would rejoice,
And long and wish to hear Thy voice—
Glad when it bids me earth resign,
Secure of heaven, if Thou art mine!'

FINIS.

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